HIGH-WAYS AND BY-WAYS;

OR,

TALES OF THE ROADSIDE,

PICKED UP IN THE FRENCH PROVINCES.

BY

A WALKING GENTLEMAN.

THIRD SERIES.

"I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it; I will have it all mine."
King Henry V.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI MAHAL.

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THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI MAHAL.

THE CAGOT'S HUT,

CONTINUED.

> Affairs that walk,
> As they say spirits do, at midnight, have
> In them a wilder nature than the business
> That seeks dispatch by day.
>
> SHAKSPEARE.

6 50
THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI MAHAL.

THE CAGOT'S HUT.

CHAPTER XVII.

The general reader can scarcely imagine the hesitation with which writers record events arising from, or connected with their personal adventures. Every occurrence out of the common track has an air of fiction or improbability, and every character at all uncommon, is considered out of nature. But a little reflection would remove many of those impressions. The very facts that *on paper* always look so unreal, are in every day life perpetually happening around us; and many a scene performed by our own circle, or in which we take a part, only want

to be printed, to make them pass the bounds of belief. The fact is, that it is the fewness of those varied passages of life which are recorded, that gives to them this apocryphal air. Were a thousandth part of the *living* romances of the time to be given to the world, those inventions which have staggered credulity, would be pronounced tame and insipid, and all would declare what every one can vouch for from his own experience, that *romance* is the mere common place of life, and, like some of the general phenomena of nature, is incredible only to those who do not examine into that which forms the very essence of their own being.

I have been led to say this much, from the rather singular nature of the circumstances which combined to give a tone of what may be considered the marvellous, to the situations in which fate had placed the chief personages connected with the story I am telling. Both the persons and the events are certainly somewhat out of the track of ordinary affairs, and it is of

course for that reason, I have chosen to record them here; but I trust that my readers will not return to their actual presence now, with the less sympathy, for knowing that they were subject to the same kind of influences, which have most probably, some time or other, chequered the life of every individual reader, who may cast a line of thought into the fathomless depths of memory.

Don Melchior, it will be recollected, was fast recovering from his wound, under the skill of the monk, and the attention of Malvide. The particulars of their by-gone days which I have sketched, were gleaned chiefly during the interval between the attempted murder of my hero and his convalescence. When Malvide acquired, in the certainty of her lover's safety, a little portion of her natural gaiety, she used often to revert to the strange circumstances of her Cagot disguise, and the semblance of half-idiotcy and deformity, which she was forced to wear; to her early fears of my being leagued in

some way with her friends or Melchior's enemies; to her recovered confidence, and again recurring apprehensions on the visit of Serjeant Passepartout, and the murderer—from the mention of whom she shrunk. As for me, I at times doubted the identity of the person who now conversed with me so freely. I felt often as if something was wanting to the reality of the scene; as if the hut was but half furnished with its stock of mortal moveables, and that the limping, hooded, and fancied ugly girl *should* be there, to make all real and right. More than once did Malvide gratify my somewhat sceptical anxiety, by arranging her capulet as she was wont to do in her disguise, and sportively mimicking *her own* voice and gesture—and I have been startled, while she limped before me, as though I gazed on the accurate likeness of some well known but unpleasing object. Her hood thrown aside, and her beauteous face beaming out, I was again both satisfied and contented as to her identity.

Nothing could exceed Melchior's surprise, at

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the free avowal which Father Munoz made to him of the cause of his mysterious disappearance and temporary abandonment of the world. He could scarcely credit the possibility of his friend's boyish passion for Malvide; and still more did it appear impossible that it could yet linger in the breast which had undergone such thorough revolutions of passion and feeling, such total change of sentiment, and which now beat with emotions so wide of that one. If even Melchior was sceptical on a point which involved deep adoration for the object of his own idolatry, well might my readers be so—but they will perhaps admit the strong hold taken of the heart by a first passion, and acknowledge, with a conscious sigh, the spell it casts over the mind, which new scenes, new sentiments, new fortunes, new worlds cannot dissolve.

Malvide was still more astonished at this revelation, which it was absolutely necessary to convey to her, to account for the monk's repugnance to another meeting with her. Her incre-

dulity, however, can be believed by those who comprehend the delicate texture of a truly modest mind, conscious of its purity, but ignorant of its worth. When she was at length convinced by the solemn assurances of her lover, strengthened by my poor confirmation, of the real nature of Father Munoz's feelings, she fled from almost the sound of his name: so little was she gratified at this triumphant proof of her external charms, and so still less desirous of confirming it by a display of her mental excellence.

But notwithstanding all this mutual motive for avoidance, Malvide and the monk were about to have one meeting by their joint consent, and one of a nature fit to shake to the very foundation the structure of self-denial which *he* at least had been raising.

Don Melchior, on the very first day of his being sufficiently recovered to move out of the hut, and with all the delicacy which the subject required, told Father Munoz of his and Mal-

vide's anxious desire that a marriage should be immediately solemnized between them, such as would bind them by religious contract, although under present circumstances no legal ceremony could possibly take place. The delicacy of Malvide's situation, or, as *she* felt it, the *in*delicacy, inevitable as it was, made this step imperative; and it became the more urgent, from the fears of both herself and Melchior, that were not such a bar thrown in the way, the obstinate parents might discover their retreat, and at any moment tear them asunder. Once, however, joined together by the ties of religion, they would possess a guarantee for safety that no resentment would venture to violate. Malvide might without reproach or scandal, devote herself to her sacred duties towards him, who would be then in the sight of heaven her *own*—while the promptest measures might be taken to tie the legal knot which would make her wholly his.

All this was put plainly and calmly, but forcibly by Melchior to his friend; and he ended

with a request that the monk would consent to sanction the measure, and nominate some one from among his straggling brethren to officiate on the occasion.

Father Munoz listened composedly and unmoved; and when Melchior had finished speaking, he said, in a dignified and solemn tone,

"I have listened, my friend, with attention, but I had anticipated all you meant to say. Could you have supposed me so indifferent to your happiness—to *her's*—as not to have weighed well every circumstance of your present situation? You believe me oppressed with thoughts of more magnitude, but I have yet room enough left in my mind for considerations which embrace your happiness. My personal views are beyond this world, but I still possess feelings for its affairs, when the weal of others is at stake. Witness the contents of this girdle, this sabre, these copies of correspondence, this form, worn already by fatigue, a constitution breaking fast! Yes, Melchior, your welfare is dear to me, and

THE INDORE MAHARAJA ... SARASWATI MAHAL

I have not forgotten it. I enter into all your thoughts, and am ready to aid your wishes; nor shall you seek a stranger to perform the most important action which involves your happiness. *I* will unite you with Malvide! At the altar of God I will meet her, with feelings of subdued yet undiminished strength; glowing with a flame as bright and pure as the incense that shall burn before me; and mounting up, like it, an offering to heaven, while I perform a double sacrifice, worthy a Christian priest, and fitting a sinful man!"

Against this decision of the priest there was no appeal; his manner had a stamp of authority upon it that prevented dissent, and silenced opposition; and even Melchior, his conqueror in the field, felt an undescribable sense of awe, while singly in the presence of this strange being, whose influence seemed to extend to all who came in contact with him. This unexpected arrangement was communicated by Melchior to Malvide; and she, although with feelings of

infinite constraint, consented. I was informed of Father Munoz's determination, by her and Melchior jointly; and to me was left the management of the exterior matters leading to the ceremony, which was fixed for the morrow.

To give as much solemnity as possible to the marriage, it was decided that it should be performed in the chapel of the Virgin, in the Vale of Héas, before noticed. Don Melchior's weak state made it necessary that he should be carried there, in the easiest kind of litter to be hastily constructed; and to secure as much respectability as was consistent with secrecy, and the limited extent of present connections, it was settled, that the duty of giving away the bride should devolve on Serjeant Passepartout— my religion incapacitating me from such an important task. I was deputed to make the communication to my friend the serjeant, and I immediately crossed the ravine to his quarters, to lose no time on my mission.

When the serjeant saw me scrambling up the

roughest and shortest path, but which was not till I was almost close to the rock on which he sat reading, he started up and rushed towards me, dashing down his book, and wiping his eyes with his black silk nightcap, which he hastily took from his head for that purpose, and to salute me at the same time.

"Good evening, Serjeant," said I, puffing for breath.

The serjeant seemed as much out of wind as myself, for he squeezed my hand and sobbed, but did not speak.

"Why, what's the matter?" said I; "you are not ill, I hope?"

"No—nothing—never mind—not at all ill—" answered he, with averted face—"not *ill*, but *sacre peste!* these fellows have no right to sport with one's feelings in this way!"

"Who? What? Pray explain," said I, anxiously.

"I *can't* explain," replied he—"don't you

see I can't? Curse this sensibility of mine, it plays the very devil with a man's comfort—but then the women like it"—added he, looking full in my face, with a brisk and smirking expression on his; "they like it, depend upon it they do; and this very fellow, this Racine here, with all his poetry, could not make his way faster to a female heart by writing his verses, than I could by weeping over them. Yes, I am not at all ashamed of it; I have cried myself sick, (blowing his nose fiercely) ay, quite sick of the sorrows of this dear Iphigenie (taking up the book), and my tears dry up again as if a furnace blew its blasts over them: such is my indignation at the cruel brute of a father who would have sacrificed her. And as to that Achilles, my own name-sake, a brave soldier though, we must allow that, he'd have fought the devil to give him his due; but if he had had a friend like me in all Aulide, he'd have carried the girl off, in spite of every impedi-

ment, and I'd have helped him! Ay, may I perish if I would not have married them myself!"

I could scarcely avoid taking off my hat, and making a low bow to the memory of Racine, for having so opportunely worked up the feelings of the serjeant, to suit the very purpose I had in hand. I saw that he was in the vein, and I lost no time in coming to the point. A very few words sufficed to state the object of my visit, and in fewer still he gave his delighted consent to perform the part assigned him, winding up with a prayer for the happiness of the intended bride, as fervent as if he had been her father a thousand times over.

I returned soon to the hut, recounted the success of my application, helped my friends to a laugh on the strength of the serjeant's heroics, and employed the rest of the evening in preparing the "order of the procession" for the morrow.

The morrow came, and a bright sky and clear

atmosphere smiled propitiously on the day. Don Melchior felt a whole month's amendment to have resulted from the happy feelings of one night. He arose early, assisted by his faithful soldier servant, who with one of his comrades formed the whole *suite* of the late commander of so many hundreds. He was cheerful and looked well, and Malvide was a living emblem of the best feelings of the mind acting on an enlarged and lofty spirit; her bearing was suited to the importance of the day. She looked conscious of the serious station she occupied; but the tender sentiments which filled her heart, gave her an air of blended dignity and softness, which was at once striking and soothing. I, accompanied by the monk, arrived early at the hut from Gedro; Serjeant Passepartout, with four of his men, soon joined us, and after the form of breakfasting was gone through by the chief actors in this scene, we prepared for our descent into the valley where the chapel stood.

Father Munoz abstained from entering the

hut, or having the gratification of speaking to his friend, so scrupulously did he avoid the possibility of meeting with Malvide, until on the steps of the altar, he might safely trust his eyes with the sight of those matured and cultivated charms, which in their very opening had so inflamed his youthful mind, and even in his late unexpected meeting with them, while shrouded in the semblance of death itself, had shaken his heart to its inmost depths. He therefore lingered at the foot of the hill, in sight of the hut, and ready to precede our advance as soon as we set out.

In a very little time we were on our march. Don Melchior lay on a kind of couch, composed of mattrasses and bolsters, placed on branches of pine, and carried at arm's length by Serjeant Passepartout's kind-hearted soldiers, who were relieved at intervals by Don Melchior's servant and his comrade. The narrowness of the paths made it impossible for Malvide to walk beside her lover, as she two or three times attempted;

but she followed close to his litter, leaning on my arm; while Serjeant Passepartout, with a solicitude at once respectful and *paternal*, kept as close to her as possible, with an expression of fatherly importance and gravity on his countenance, quite suited to the solemnity of the office he was prepared to fulfil.

Descending at a gentle yet steady pace, and only halting occasionally for a few minutes to rest the bearers, we soon reached the level ground of the valley, and led by the monk, we arrived at the ponderous rock,* which I have before noticed, and there following the example of our holy guide, a short pause was made, and all the party knelt—those who felt it a duty—saying a short prayer to the Virgin, (who, as tradition testifies, once honoured this rock by her appearance upon it) and such of us as were sceptical, going through the ceremony from courtesy to our companions.

* This rock measures nearly 2000 cubit feet.

THE TAYLORE MAHARAJA ... SARASVATI

Once more in movement, the chapel of our Lady of Héas soon appeared to us, situated in the oval depth of the circus which terminates the valley. The desolate majesty of this temple is amazingly impressive. Encircled by abrupt and barren mountains, it stands in its solitude, as a type of religion amidst the desert asperities of the mind; and softening by its benignant influence the rude sublimities of nature. The situation of this elegant structure in the midst of chaotic creation, brings the contrast of nature and art more home to the mind than any illustration I have ever witnessed—and had I not matter to dwell on, pregnant with greater interest to me, I might add some of my own vague reveries on the subject of poetical susceptibility, to the vapoury speculations which the subject has already drawn forth.

A group of three or four men was standing at the porch of the chapel when it broke upon our sight, but on the approach of Father Munoz they retired into it, and the entire of our party

soon reached the entrance. I was too much occupied with the observation of Malvide and Melchior, to pay minute attention to the surrounding scenery. It made, however, a strong impression upon me, as bearing an aspect of most uncompromising savageness. The hollowed entrance of the amphitheatre showed the dried up bed of a lake, which, formed two centuries back by the bursting of a torrent, was, about forty years since, by a new phenomenon, swept dry at once, its waters rushing from it with terrific speed, and ravaging the valley as they forced their way along. When I looked around me in search of some spot of verdure, I only saw a scanty patch of herbage-ground, here and there among the crags, and even these showed the traces of a hail-storm of unusual fury, that had a fortnight before seared the fair face of vegetation, and scarcely left its vestige on the land. I turned from all this to the contemplation of the lover's sun-bright looks; but I felt, on entering the chapel, a spell of I knew not what

oppression, which I in vain endeavoured to shake off.

The first objects that struck me within were not of a nature to lessen this feeling. Above twenty of the straggling vagabonds of "The Faith," were scattered in the church, leaning against the pillars, or lounging near the altar. Don Melchior and myself exchanged electrical looks, and at the next instant both our eyes turned on Malvide who suddenly became the colour of death. A hurried glance shewed me Passepartout's countenance, and it spoke displeased astonishment—but when my gaze fixed on the monk, as he stood with his back to the altar, I saw a calm and proud enthusiasm beaming from his face.

"'Tis nothing but chance," said I to Melchior and Malvide; "this is the natural refuge of those fanatics in their idle hours—be assured 'tis nothing of design."

Melchior shook his head, dissatisfied—but he pressed Malvide's hand fondly between his, and

she smiled and recovered the natural colouring of her cheeks. The litter was now laid down, Melchior stood up from it, and leaning on my arm he walked up the aisle; and when we reached the altar steps, he knelt upon them and leaned against the railing for support. Malvide was close beside him; Serjeant Passepartout stood up erect, as though on parade; and I with the French soldiers occupied a place at a respectful distance from the rest. Melchior's Spanish attendants stood like sentinels outside the chapel, and the soldiers of the Faith seemed carelessly to occupy themselves as before, regarding the rude representations of miracles and portraits of saints, daubed by some rustic artist on the walls.

I felt a delicacy that forbade me to pay too strict an attention to rites in which I might have been considered, in a sectarian point of view, to have no sympathy. I therefore neither looked nor listened too minutely, contenting myself with a passing glance of admiration a Malvide,

whose simple robe of white muslin, fastened closely round her neck, assorted chastely with the ungarnished ringlets of her hair, and the natural blushes of her cheeks. From this lovely object my eyes wandered to the splendours of the altar, and its four richly wreathed columns, in the oval cavity behind which was enshrined the suspended figure of the Virgin herself, in all the holiness of paint and gilding, surrounded by angels of equal dignity; while the dove-like emblem of the spirit of life surmounted all, in clouds of pink and blue. Two minor altars flanked this principal one, and were severally decorated with pictorial anticipations of purgatory and the last judgment, in each of which the gross imagination of the artist had embodied the most revolting notions of bigotry and blasphemy. Such are the disfiguring mockeries that degrade this beautiful temple, and stifle the pure breathings of religion in their spurious atmosphere.

The monk had for some minutes spoken in a

solemn tone—I know not in what form of words —and I saw that Melchior and Malvide were preparing to reply; but before either could utter a response, or speak the words that were to bind them together for life, Don Melchior's Spanish servant rushed into the chapel, and with unreverential haste proceeded up the aisle. The monk looked, as I thought, astonished; and both Melchior and Malvide started up from their kneeling position, and listened eagerly to some whispered communication from the servant. Don Melchior looked surprise personified, while Malvide clasped her hands, as if delight was mixed with her wonder.

A bustle at the church door excited my attention; and looking in that direction, I perceived two of the inelegant sedan-chairs of the country, used for the conveyance of delicate or ailing admirers of the picturesque, out of which an elderly gentleman and lady were coming. But a figure, rather incongruous to the solemn scene and its romantic associations, particularly

struck me. This was a spruce, powdered, laced, and liveried lacquey, in that overdone grotesque costume which is so common, even now, amongst the old nobility of France. This fellow came capering up the aisle, with an air and smile that I thought familiar to me—but I was soon put out of doubt as to my imperfect recollection of him, by Malvide springing forward to meet him, with a frank and cordial manner, exclaiming, "Felix! Is it then you, indeed? And can it be possible that what I hear is the truth?"

"Yes, my dear Mademoiselle, that it is, if my worthy friend here, Antonio, understood my mumbling, and told you that the Vicomte and Madame are come to give you away."

Here the confused surprise of Malvide and Melchior was completed by the entrance of the Vicomte and Vicomtesse d'Euplandre. As they advanced into the church, a young man of simple mien, who accompanied them to the door, retired almost unperceived except by me; and

I observed him to mount a horse which was held by an attendant, and gallop away at full speed.

In a moment Malvide was clasped in her mother's arms, from which she withdrew awhile, only to fly into her father's less cordial embrace. A scene of brief but most important explanation ensued, to lead to which it is necessary shortly to state the results of Felix's return to his master's château, after the night on which I made his acquaintance, and of his departure from the Cagot's hut, accompanied by his quondam associate, the vile Sanchez.

CHAPTER XVIII.

No sooner did the news of Felix's return to the château penetrate into the Vicomte's study and his wife's *boudoir*, than they both came out to meet the long expected messenger. There was an air of broken pride about the father, as if the disgrace rather than the loss of his child was most thought of. The mother bore all the evidence of sleepless nights and days passed in weeping.

Felix's first exclamation was, "She is safe!" and, without a word of reply to the rapid questions which assailed him, he produced Malvide's epistle to her parents, the rough sketch of which had caught my attention as it lay on the table

in the Cagot's hut. In this letter she avowed the step she had taken, in language of affectionate respect to those to whom she owed her being, but of firm devotion to him who now owned her first allegiance; she did not discover the place of her concealment, but expressed her anxiety to do so when she should receive an assurance that her parents would sanction her choice by their consent, and sanctify her nuptials by their blessing.

The unbounded joy of her mother on seeing the certificate of Malvide's existence, and having her safety confirmed by the assurance of Felix, led her into a hundred absurd but natural displays. The first feeling of her heart was delighted consent to Malvide's union with Melchior; and she urged her husband to set off immediately with her, guided by Felix, to fulfil to the utmost their recovered child's desire. But the Viconte did not travel quite so fast on this road to reconciliation. Satisfied that his child was safe, he required a little time for what he called reflec-

tion, but which was, in fact, stratagem. He made a fruitless effort to persuade Felix to betray the secret of Malvide's retreat, but this the honest fellow steadily refused to do. Finding this attempt unsuccessful, the Vicomte cogitated on the best method to accomplish his design of regaining his daughter, and of still preventing her marriage with her plighted lover.

The Vicomte had, in his early intercourse with the world, obtained that little smattering of diplomatic guile which men of limited intellect consider tantamount to wisdom, because it enables them to deceive and overreach those gifted beings in whom talent leaves no room for the base chicaneries of mean minds. The Vicomte had *mystified* many a better man than himself, and he thought he ran no risk of failure in doing so now with so insignificant a personage as his own servant Felix, although he knew the fellow to be sharp and shrewd. He succeeded amply in deceiving his wife, but Felix proved too cunning for him. When the latter was,

after two days' expectation, summoned to receive his master's decision on the grand question of his daughter's happiness, he soon perceived that sincerity was the very farthest of all possible things from the Vicomte's mind. While he whined, and sermonized, and protested, his credulous wife bore the responses with a tone of earnest honesty, but Felix did not credit a single word his master said. He consented to forgive Malvide, and promised to go to her and formally hand her over to her lover's possession, to spare all reproaches, forget past differences, and give her a handsome marriage portion on the spot, and he demanded of Felix to tell the place of her retreat.

It was now Felix's turn to *diplomatize*. He professed his ample reliance on the Vicomte's sincerity, and his delight at the turn affairs had taken, and vowed, with great apparent candour, that he did not know the actual place where Malvide was concealed, but that he left her in a cottage in the neighbourhood of Gedro, from

which, however, it was most probable Don Melchior had removed her. To the Vicomte's question of whether he was ready to lead to the cottage where he left her, Felix answered that he was most willing but not quite *ready*, and he demanded two or three days respite from the journey, with a well-invented and better told tale of an illness, the consequence of his late fatigues. This request was conceded, and the arrangements were concluded by an intimation from the Vicomte that, to give more seriousness to the proceeding, he would endeavour to prevail on Monsieur Depourvu, the rejected suitor, not only peaceably to abandon his claims on Malvide, but to consent to form one of the party, to give up in person all pretensions to her hand, and even attend the ceremony of its being bestowed on Melchior.

Felix thought this was widely overshooting the mark of probable obsequiousness on the part of even the simple Monsieur Depourvu; and, convinced that some treachery was intended,

he was resolved to use every precaution to counteract it. The poor fellow was indeed sadly puzzled what to do, or how to oppose machinations which he did not even understand. He wished to write to Don Melchior and Malvide; but the uncertainty of affairs at the seat of frontier war made him abandon that plan. Father Munoz's quarters he thought more likely to be fixed, for he knew nothing of the ruinous attempt which the warlike monk had made, and which scattered him and his followers still more widely on the face of the earth. To the priest, therefore, he wrote, giving a full detail of the matters which were passing at the Chateau d'Euplandre, warning him of the approaching arrival of the Vicomte and his party, and entreating the pious champion of church and state to devote his best energies to devising plans for the safety of the interesting, and about-to-be persecuted young lady, whom he had already promised to protect. This letter he forwarded by a trusty messenger, a sort of itinerant cou-

rier, who gained his livelihood by carrying on secret communications of this kind, and who safely delivered his despatches into Father Munoz's hands at the inn of Gedro, three days afterwards, late in the evening, when he and I had returned from our attendance on Don Melchior at the Cagot's hut.

This step taken, Felix felt his mind in some slight measure relieved, but he still suffered great inquietude on the score of his own incapacity to avert the treachery which he feared to be impending over his dear young mistress. The time, however, approached for setting out, and he prepared to act as guide on the eventful journey, with a heavy presentiment of difficulty, danger, and disappointment. When the party, consisting of the Vicomte, his lady, Monsieur Depourvu, and Felix, reached St. Sauveur, within a few miles of the vale of Héas, they were obliged to abandon the carriage in which they had travelled so far, as the road farther on was impassable, except for those who

journeyed on horseback, on foot, or in the sedan chairs before-mentioned. The arrangements for the remainder of the route were soon made, two of those conveyances being engaged for the old couple, and a horse for the young gentleman, while Felix was to precede the others with a staff in his hand, acting at once as guide and running footman.

Two things surprised and did not tend to satisfy Felix, during their short delay at St. Sauveur. The first was the appearance of six Gens-d'armes, an unusual sight in those parts, between whom and Monsieur Depourvu an intelligence very plainly subsisted, and next, to Felix's still greater astonishment, a Spaniard, evidently one of the ragamuffins belonging to the royal party, who lounged about the inn door when the carriage arrived, inquired the names of the party, and, giving a letter to the Vicomte, disappeared. Felix watched his master as he read, and thought he could discover a variety of emotions depicted in his

face; but a short apparent struggle between them, ended in his ordering the men to advance as fast as possible to the chapel of the Virgin. They, no doubt, supposing that they carried some pious and wealthy pilgrims, hastened onwards, and arrived at the end of their expedition, just in time, as we have seen, to interrupt Father Munoz in the ceremony he had commenced.

When Felix reached the chapel, and heard from his late acquaintance, Melchior's servant, what was going on inside, he had no doubt that the note which was delivered to his master at St. Sauveur, was from Malvide; and that the pride of the father would not let him condescend to communicate its contents to him. His joy was boundless at the certainty which seemed to exist of the marriage being completed, and, as he rushed into the church, he quite forgot the six Gens-d'armes who had followed the party all the way from St. Sauveur, to the opening of the vale of Héas, where they halted; and was totally

unobservant of Monsieur Depourvu, having remounted his horse, and galloped off at all speed, as I have before described.

When Malvide's arms were loosened from her father's neck, and once more twined round her mother's, the Vicomte, with all the assumed dignity, which apprehension allowed him to muster, demanded "If the ceremony was indeed concluded?"

"No, Sir," said Melchior, who had risen from his kneeling posture to advance towards the Vicomte, "no, luckily we are not too late to receive the honoured sanction of yourself and my Malvide's mother, which alone was wanted to complete the happiness of this scene."

"Then stop, at your peril, I command it!" exclaimed the Vicomte, his harsh features assuming a more rigid expression. "This solemn farce must not be persevered in. Invalid and illegal before, it is now impious, when I, the father of this rash girl, in the very temple of God, protest against this violence."

"It is no violence, it is my own doing, go on—go on—and save me from my father," cried Malvide, throwing herself upon Melchior's neck, but addressing this supplication to the monk.

"Munoz proceed! in the name of Heaven itself, I call on you"—cried Melchior—"you have begun the rites, let nothing now make you violate your duty—proceed—proceed!"

Here a scene of indescribable confusion ensued. The Vicomte loudly protested against the marriage going on; his wife fell down in a fit of violent hysterics: Malvide's sweet voice was raised far beyond its usual pitch, in passionate entreaties to Munoz to complete the rites—and Melchior used every persuasion to the same effect, with all the manly eloquence of which he was so much master.

Every one spoke at once; the lounging soldiers of the Faith, gathered round the altar, when the altercation was going on, and their hoarse voices murmured in gloomy tones. Melchior's servant joined his louder exclamations

to the din. Serjeant Passepartout, who felt rather sore in being despoiled of his parental authority, boldly opposed the real father of the would-be bride, and execrated the tyranny he was endeavouring to exercise: and, in the midst of all, Felix, who had recognized me, came up to the place where I stood, quite pale from agitation, and his teeth chattering together, and said, in a tone which seemed combined of grief and fear,

"It is too plain, I see it all; it is a plot between my master and that damned monk. What a fool I have been all through! It is all my fault, miserable dupe that I am!"

These words drew my attention to Father Munoz, and I observed him to look on all the bustle around him, with a countenance in which agitation, but of what kind, I knew not, was strongly depicted. He had suffered the clamour to proceed for a long time undisturbed; but at length, he raised himself up in his loftiest style, and elevating both hands, he called out in

French, and in a tone that once extinguished the united din of all the others:—

"Silence, and listen *to me!*"

This sound of authority, coming with all the legislative force of a religious mandate, hushed the confusion at once, and every eye was turned with expectant anxiety towards the monk.

"Silence! nor let the walls of this holy place be profaned by this irreverend clamour. To you Vicomte d'Euplandre, I chiefly address myself; with you this scandal has its origin. Cease your intemperate interruption, and let the ceremony proceed, which you yourself have sanctioned by your consent, and which you are now here by solemn notice to witness. No interruption, Sir," thundered he, with increasing vehemence, as the Vicomte gave a sign, and in that tone which a monarch might quail to. "This must not be, the holy rites have begun—the marriage is virtually performed—Heaven must not be trifled with, nor the church defrauded!"

A moment's pause allowed the Vicomte time

for thought. He was recovering himself and preparing a reply, when a clatter of horses' hoofs, broke the stillness, and produced on all a strange variety of sensation. Malvide clung closer to Melchior; he, with exhausted frame and agitated look, held her to his heart. The father bounded with joy, and in bold defiance of the priest, exclaimed,

"Here they come! the armed police of the land, with the affianced husband of my daughter. No base adventurer like this shall be my son—no vagrant monk like you, shall dare dictate to me. Come in, come in, Depourvu, with the Gens-d'armes—quickly alight!" continued he, in his loudest tone.

"Close the door!" vociferated Munoz in Spanish, and waving his hand. The soldiers of the Faith sprang forward to do his bidding, but the Gens-d'armes were already dismounted and in the porch, and headed by Depourvu they came clattering up the aisle to the impatient calls of the Vicomte.

"Execute the law!" cried he, "seize on this daughter of mine, no longer worthy to be acknowledged as such—seize on her, Gens-d'armes!"

"At your peril lay hands on this lady," exclaimed Melchior, who looked terrors, but was evidently little able to act them, for he was so exhausted as rather to require Malvide's support than afford her any. Her courage and strength seemed to rise with the danger, and she stood firmly clasping her lover, as the Gens-d'armes approached them. The mother now interfered, and with an energy little to be expected from her former display, protested against this violent interference.

"I am her mother," said she, "and I refuse my assent to these proceedings. Her happiness is my first object, and I sanction her union with the man of her choice."

"Madame!" cried the Vicomte, trembling with rage, and seizing his wife by the arm, as if to shake her into submission.

"My dear, dear mother," said Malvide, loosening her hold of Melchior, and clasping the Vicomtesse to her bosom.

"What is all this?" vociferated the Vicomte, stamping on the ground; "am I to be baffled in this way by a pair of women and a monk? Gens-d'armes, do your duty! Depourvu, have you nothing to say?"

"Nothing! To be sure, I have a great deal to say," said the simple looking young gentleman, rousing himself into a very choleric fit; "I am the worst used man in France—my heart is breaking—the affections of the young lady are stolen from me, and her whole marriage-portion is—"

"Hush!" cried the Vicomte, putting his finger to his lips.

"Ay, it was my fortune you thought of!" said Malvide, in a bitterly contemptuous tone.

"No, it was not, Mademoiselle Malvide. It was your beauteous person—for when I thought you had drowned yourself, I dragged the fish-

ponds for your body, all the same as if you had never refused me."

"Wretch!" muttered Malvide.

"And look here," continued he, pulling out a roll of parchment from under his short riding cloak, and opening it out at considerable length, "look here, Mister Monk, and you gentlemen all," turning to Passepartout, myself, and the rest, "here is our contract of marriage, drawn out on vellum, beautifully embellished, and signed, in the first place, by the king himself; what do you think of that? then by Prince T., the Duke of D., the Marquesses of F. and G., eighteen counts and barons, and a list, too long to read to you, of the first royalist names in France! Now, Mademoiselle, what can you say after that?"

An appealing look accompanied this expression; but Malvide did not condescend to return the one, or reply to the other.

Here Serjeant Passepartout, who had been suffering all the agonies of a prattler, wishing

to edge in a word, hemmed and hawed, and drawing himself stiffly up, began with an air of mock authority.

"I really must beg to interpose at this stage of this extraordinary affair. In virtue of the character I have undertaken to fulfil, in right of my authority as the giver-away of this amiable and lovely young lady."

"In right of what?" exclaimed the Vicomte, with a petrifying glance at Passepartout.—"Giver-away!—you!—and who the devil are you, Sir?"

"I, Sir? I, Sir, am Victor Achilles Passepartout, serjeant in the —th infantry of the line, who have served my king and country—and I would have you to know, Monsieur le Vicomte"—

"Silence, Sir," interrupted the father; "how durst you presume to meddle with my affairs—to break in upon the peace of a noble family, and abet such infamous conduct as these Spaniards are engaged in? Depend upon it, Mister Serjeant, your colonel shall know of this, and you

shall dearly repent it. Giver-away, indeed! Gens-d'armes, do your duty—seize on my daughter! At your peril, delay no longer—you are here especially for that purpose—here is the prefet's authority!"

This tone of pride and menace shrivelled up the growth of the serjeant's importance. He shrunk behind me, pulling up his shirt collar, and muttering very fierce, but rather indistinct retorts; while the Gens-d'armes reluctantly set about in good earnest, obeying the order so peremptorily given, and justified by the magistrate's written warrant. Felix kept all through the scene, wringing his hands and exclaiming to me, "A plot, a plot, a vile plot between my master and the monk! You'll see how it will end—treachery and villainy from top to bottom—a plot, a plot, a plot!"

I was, for my part, a silent spectator of this most curious business; I felt all the awkwardness of my situation, but did not think it possible to better the concerns of those I was

so much interested for, by an interference that might have only embarrassed myself. I preferred lying quietly by, until some opportunity might offer of being really of service. Besides, I could not help (despite of Felix's denunciation), having a considerable reliance on the good faith and determination of the monk. A natural objection to think ill of persons I had once esteemed, an inclination rather to wait for being deceived than suspiciously to anticipate, influenced me on this occasion, as it has done on many others through life, to my cost! I, therefore, watched with an anxious, but not impatient curiosity for the next speech of Father Munoz; and at last it burst forth in his own peculiar manner.

"This sanctuary is profaned—the church is braved — her minister insulted — her rights trampled on! Gens-d'armes, I warn you, that you are about to commit a mortal sin! As for you, gentlemen, I shall feel it my duty to curse you from this holy place, if you dare persist."

THE TANJORE MAHARAJAH SERFOJI'S SARASVATI

This much was said in French, but it produced little effect, except in causing a frightful paleness to overspread Depourvu's countenance. But the Vicomte urged on the Gens-d'armes, and they were on the point of seizing on Malvide, and snatching her from the arms of her mother and lover.

"Then, since words are of no avail," cried Munoz, in the high sounding diction of his native tongue, "since religion is scoffed and its temple defiled, soldiers of the Faith, champions of the church, children of God, do your duty!"

With these words, he drew from beneath his cassock his gleaming sabre, and, at the signal, full twenty long bladed knives started from their scabbards, in the hands of the hitherto careless and inactive Spaniards.

"Now, who dares oppose my orders? Go on, my gallant friends," cried Munoz, his military ardour overcoming all religious feelings, except that of *domination*. The remainder of the assemblage seemed paralyzed by the prompt

obedience of the Spaniards, who immediately set about the work they were evidently prepared for. Pushing aside the Gens-d'armes, they approached Melchior and Malvide, and gently seizing him, they laid him on his litter, and carefully bound him down with cords, which they carried about them. Four of them raised him up—two others advanced towards the door, while the remainder formed a rank, at each side of the litter, keeping the Vicomte, Depourvu, and their Gens-d'armes outside the lines, but admitting within them Malvide and her mother, who both staid close to Don Melchior, and endeavoured to pacify his rage at this proceeding.

The whole thing was done so suddenly that neither Passepartout, Felix, or myself had time to exchange observations.

"Now onwards to the frontier!" cried the monk, in Spanish, to his men, "bear your prisoner safely! And, gentlemen," continued he, speaking in French, "it is thus I terminate this disgraceful scene. Married or single, this rebel

Spaniard is my prisoner—I take him in the name of my king, although on neutral ground, and I hope your monarch will bear me harmless—for it is no time standing on nice points. Had the ceremony been completed, his wife would have been my prize as well, for an old law subjects all women married within a league of the frontiers to the allegiance of their husbands,* but having been grossly interrupted, this lady is free to abandon Don Melchior, or to follow his fate. Let her decide quickly, for we must not lose time.

"He is my husband—I will follow him to whatever fate your treachery may doom him—lead on!" exclaimed Malvide, in broken and suffocating accents.

"She shall not go—I will tear her from his side—Gens-d'armes, do your duty!" cried the Vicomte; but as they made a movement, as if to seize Malvide, once more Father Munoz

* My readers need not search for this law, for the monk acknowledged the mention of it to have been a *ruse*.

waved his hand, and a dozen knives were held out, so as quite to intimidate all opposition, and Malvide walked beside the litter which was now carried on at a brisk pace, the monk following in martial triumph.

The Vicomte caught his wife firmly, and held her back from her daughter's hurried embrace. Passepartout stood steadily with his four men, having no regret for the Vicomte's defeat, puzzled at the monk's conduct, but determined to observe a strict neutrality in this strange proceeding. I went on, resolved to follow the fortunes of Melchior and Malvide, as long as I was permitted. Felix swore vehemently that he too would go with Malvide and watch over her to the last—and, as we all left the church, I saw the Vicomte stamping and foaming with fury, while Depourvu tremblingly applied a smelling bottle alternately to his own and the Vicomtesse's nose.

650

CHAPTER XIX.

ONCE out of the chapel, the party moved on at a rate which kept Malvide almost breathless, and gave Felix and myself enough to do to keep up with them. We had, however, proceeded but a short distance, when the monk contracted his strides, his men did as much by their's; and one of them, obeying the orders of his chief, approached a hut which stood a little way from our path up the mountain side; from which he soon descended, leading a small horse, with a rude saddle formed of goat skins, and a rope serving as an apology for a bridle. Upon this animal Malvide mounted, and the whole party was again in motion, following the course of the

valley to the north east, and soon passing the opening to the vale of Estaubé, and leaving behind the hideous crags which form the bounds of its solitude.

Turning suddenly round the shoulder of the most northern of the chain of hills that skirt the valley of Héas, we soon crossed a little river which flows rapidly down to join the Gave at Gedro: and we were quickly on the ascent leading to the desert mountains between Pic Long and Neon Vielle. Felix and I kept at some distance behind the monk, who was himself always about a hundred yards in rear of the main party. Melchior and Malvide were thus unobstructedly left to their own converse, for the rough Spaniards were mostly, if not all, ignorant of French, and at any rate they evidently shewed no inclination to interrupt their prisoner in any communication with his fair companion.

When they had got some way up the ascent, and were on the point of entering a defile which

would shut out completely the view of the country we had been in so long, Father Munoz made a signal to his men, and they obeyed it by halting and laying down the litter. He then turned round and beckoned to me. I answered his silent summons by stepping briskly forwards; and Felix accompanied me, although with no good-will to the monk, against whom he had continued to pour a torrent of reproachful abuse from the moment we quitted the chapel. We were very soon close to Munoz, who silently walked onwards, we beside him, until we reached the place where the litter was deposited on the heath, with Malvide, who had dismounted, kneeling beside it.

"So, Munoz, was this well done?" cried Don Melchior. "How can you come before me, and brave my reproaches? Could I have suspected *you* of this baseness!"

"What, Melchior!" said the monk, in a tone of infinitely more sprightliness than I had yet heard from him, and with an awkward air of

humour in his manner, "What! Is it you that speak thus? Is this the clear-sighted, clever, intelligent, Melchior de Trevazos? I should rather have taken it for that fish-pond searcher, Depourvu. And do you really believe me treacherous? Did you not comprehend the stratagem, which alone could have saved you in the crisis of your fate, and that of her who is, in my eyes, your wife? Come, Melchior, rouse yourself, and, with loosened cords, know no bonds but hers!"

With these words, he cut the ropes which had held Don Melchior down.

"Is it possible!" cried the latter, rising up, "you are indeed a man of mystery—but pardon my dulness, Munoz; accept my grateful thanks, my best friend."

"Extraordinary, noble man!" exclaimed Malvide, throwing herself at Munoz's feet, and catching his hand which she pressed to her lips with warmth. But this was too much for him. He started, trembled, snatched his hand away,

and turned abruptly to the other side of the narrow path, where Felix, who was working himself into a fit of astonished atonement, dropped on both his knees, and holding his hands up in the attitude of prayer, begged the priest to forgive his suspicions, and inflict the severest penance which such unholy misgivings merited.

Father Munoz extricated himself from this importunate penitent, (whose very sudden fit of piety did not last long), and recovering from the more embarrassing acknowledgments of Malvide, he addressed Melchior again, but with much greater gravity than before.

"Yes, my friend, you may be satisfied of my constant fidelity to you. I could not, if I would, betray you. A strong principle of duty binds me to your interests now, and I will see you *both* safely through this intricate embarrassment. My political feelings, my religious duty, are all apart from these sentiments of private and personal regard. I know you now

only as Melchior, my old college friend—I forget that you are my opponent in public life, and have been my conqueror in the field. Rely on my acting up to this!—and now to the immediate danger which may press upon you. The Vicomte and his expected son-in-law will not rest here, depend upon it; some effort to overtake us, and get possession of your bride—for such she is, or at least shall be—will be immediately made. This must be averted. I spoke of the frontiers; and this route on which we now are, would lead to the pass of Bielsa, towards which they will no doubt suppose us to have gone, as the nearest entrance into Spain. There, however, we cannot attempt to go. Your late wound, and this present agitation, forbid the exertion, and you would not, I must believe, entrust this fair treasure into the perils of frontier warfare, where you could not protect her, and where neither I nor these gallant fellows could at present venture."

"'Tis all too true," said Melchior; "but in this impossibility, what is to be done?"

"To seek some secure retreat—and *such* I know of—and to deceive our pursuers, if they become such—and *that* I can accomplish. But first," continued the monk, "let me briefly explain, what may have appeared treacherous, and even still, perhaps, looks doubtful, in my past conduct."

We all listened with attention—but none gaped so wide as Felix. Father Munoz continued:

"Well, then, when, two days back, I received the letter from this worthy follower and trusty friend of your's (Felix smiled contentedly), announcing the Vicomte's consent, and the approach of himself and the lady's mother, I resolved to be, as I told you on the very day I got the letter, myself the solemnizer of your union. I did not at first listen to the fears of treachery expressed by Felix—(Felix nodded his head, in approbation of his own sagacity)

and I wrote to the Vicomte last night a letter, announcing the place and hour fixed for the marriage, which I sent by one of my followers to await his arrival at St. Sauveur, and which as it appears was safely delivered. I there used every expression which could conciliate him, and held you up, my friend, in the tone you so well merited. Still some misgivings came slowly across my mind. I read again the letter of Felix—I recollected what he had told me, during our interviews in Spain, of the Vicomte's hostility to the match—I put together what I had learned from you of this harsh father's character, and what I had, in days gone by, heard of it from his neighbours—and I resolved to be on my guard, and prepared for whatever might compromise your happiness, and the lady's safety. I therefore, as you have seen, revealed somewhat of the affair, to the troop of devoted followers—I reckoned on them, and gave them my orders. You have seen their conduct—that speaks for them. But I determined

to give the Vicomte every fair chance, and I purposely concealed his coming from you and *her*, that the surprise might be more delightful if he were sincere, and the measures of opposition wholly *my own*, should he prove false. I have no more to add—I leave my conduct to your candid consideration. I have taken all upon myself—no suspicion of previous concert can attach to you. No law has been violated but that of neutrality, and you alone have a right to complain of me; but I trust to your forgiveness," and a faint smile accompanied his words, as Don Melchior pressed his hand in his.

"My mention," continued he, "of the frontier law relative to the allegiance of women married on the limits, was mere invention, to give a better colour to the apparent treachery which I strove to affix to my own conduct. That was, like the assertion of my design against you, Melchior, a falsehood—I confess it—but these only means of procuring your safety, and en-

suring that which alone makes it worth your having, will be justified, I believe, by the end which I hope to accomplish."

We will not stop, to debate on the monk's morality; my own went hand in hand with his, in this affair; and I joined my warm approval to the reiterated expressions of gratitude which burst from Melchior and Malvide, re-echoed in loud applauses by Felix, whose bearing on the occasion accorded with the promise of his name.

"Let our measures be prompt then," cried Melchior. "I shudder at the thought of violence being used against this dear object, whom, alas! I cannot now defend. What is to be done? I trust all to your energy and foresight, Munoz —pray decide at once."

"My decision has been for some time made," said the monk. "We must here divide the party. Four men alone must remain with you, enough to bear you along, and almost too much to avoid observation, even in the wilds you are

MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S SARASVATI MAHAL LIBRARY

about to traverse. I, with the remainder, will take this southward path towards the pass of Bielsa. An imitation of your litter shall be borne along, so as to deceive those who may follow us. You and your bride must, under the guidance of these four brave and faithful fellows, proceed direct to the caves of Sarrancolin, where you can without risk await my coming. Trust to my joining you ere many hours break into the night. To our worthy Felix I would suggest his rejoining his master and the simple tool of his tyranny. He can accomplish two desirable objects, the tranquillizing of the mother's mind, and, by the exercise of his inventive talents, detaching, if possible, the baffled Depourvu from the party of the Vicomte, and leading him into our toils in the caverned solitudes of Sarrancolin. Once there, I can conceive it easy to persuade him to become not only a witness but a party to your marriage, which must *there* be completed in one of those subterraneous wonders of nature, which want but

consecration to give them the solemnity of the most laboured temple worked of art. What say you, Felix: will you undertake the task?"

"Yes, that I will—and trust to my imagination for inveigling the young gentleman. I am ready to start on your reverence's mission, but how must I find out the caves of Sarrancolin?"

"I will be your guide to them," replied Father Munoz; "and you must meet me at nightfall, or a messenger whom I shall send to conduct you to me, here on this very spot, whence, by quick travelling, we shall reach the place in a few hours. I will look for you here, Felix, at six o'clock—and I hope, if your ingenuity does not forsake you, that you will be accompanied by Monsieur Depourvu."

"Well then," said Felix, "since time is precious, and suspicion must not be excited, I shall now go to rejoin the Vicomte and his party, to whom I must say that I have been driven back from my attendance on Mademoiselle, by

your reverence and your Spaniards, who were crossing the frontiers with their prize."

"Exactly so," said Munoz; "and now for our English friend—what says he? Is he tired of this adventurous affair, or will he go through with it till its close?"

"I shall certainly not abandon my friends in this moment of doubt and difficulty," cried I; "and, if they permit me, I shall join my feeble aid to that of their escort, and proceed with them to Sarrancolin."

Consent and thanks for this proposition followed as matters of course; and in a very short time we were all in route for our several destinations—the priest and his detachment, with their mock prisoner on his litter, winding along the mountain path towards the pass of Bielsa, and Felix trudging his way back towards the Vale of Héas, where we could plainly distinguish the Vicomte and his party in serious conference.

As the monk and his men disappeared, and

were seen again at intervals, and the party in the vale took their steady observation, we slowly proceeded on our way, concealed completely from view, yet, from the nature of the scanty woods we marched through, commanding for a while a perfect sight of the whole.

Never, I think, did I observe the mountain range and the basements it sprang from, to more advantage than from that spot. The day was of that bright transparent kind which in these districts gives a distinctness to all objects, inexpressibly beautiful. There was none of the vagueness of mist which nourishes the abstract wanderings of mind in such a scene, but all was marked with the reality of nature's touch, and standing out in living evidence of its actual presence. Below me were the Vales of Estaubé and Héas, dreary and desolate foundations, from which upsprung at once huge walls of granite, that formed the first gradation of the stupendous chain spreading far away from east to west. Mount Perdu heaved up its giant-head, a cone

thick-covered with snow; and its vast and swelling sides displayed, in every varied aspect, rocks, woods, ravines, and all that the mind imagines of the wild and terrible. The surrounding mountains presented a mass of unbroken simplicity and grandeur. No shock of nature seems to have ever moved a blade of the bright herbage which smiles in perpetual verdure on their sides. A thousand varieties of, to me, nameless flowers sprinkled the foundation green, as if a shower of every-coloured gems had fallen upon the earth. Silver and gold and saffron, blue and crimson, in all their most delicate shades, were blended in rich colouring there. A stream ran through the nearest valley, in a bed of marble, dazzlingly white. Of this, two cascades were formed, of singular beauty. The first fell from a considerable height, its light foam dissipating in a veil of mist, through which the dancing sunbeams formed arches of rainbow hues to grace their sport. The second of these waterfalls was still

more striking. Its broad and limpid sheet flowed smoothly to the verge of the marble blocks from which it fell. There, divided in its course by an enormous rock, one half dashed brawling on through the picturesque impediments with which nature loves to vary her creations; the other streaming down from the projecting ledge, in a bright and continuous flow, a height which I neither could nor would care to measure, and falling unobstructedly into the basin where these liquid twins were re-united, and whence they bounded on in a sinuous course, which the eye could not follow long. Pasturages, hamlets and scattered villages were all within my immediate view. In the distance, the long chain of blue and snowy hills formed limits to the sight, and a starting place for fancy's adventurous flights. No one concomitant was wanting, to make the situation perfect in its kind.

And how many thousands of our travellers, thought I—and I must repeat the thought—have never known these wondrous scenes!—tra-

THE MAHARAJAH ... LIBRARY

vellers who have passed admiring days among the steaming crowds of cathedral aisles, the sumptuous fopperies of palace finery, the dark disgusts of gloomy catacombs, never tired of wondering at the works of men, but ignorant of these glorious master-pieces of the Hand by which man himself was made.

While I paused to look back upon this scene, the convoy had disappeared in the defile; and turning away at once from the objects I had too long gazed at, I plunged into the copse which led to tracts of a different aspect and character. I soon overtook my friends, and the sturdy fellows who silently and carefully bore Don Melchior along, with all that air of proud fidelity so distinctive of Spaniards, feeling themselves bound, by every honourable tie, to the service of the man whom a few days before they had ranked amongst their deadliest foes.

We went cautiously forward at a steady pace, the Spaniards making light of their burden. Malvide, who was now enveloped in one of the

short mantles of the soldier guides, cheering Melchior by her affectionate devotion, and I, almost always a little behind, except when I at times insisted on relieving one of the bearers in carrying their gallant burthen.

Before nightfall we had passed the base of Neon Vieille, left Mount D'Arbizon far to our right, skirted Lake D'Esconbons, and crossed that species of isthmus which joins the Pic du Midi, to the southern mountains. A rapid path winds up the hills, and favours the descent at the other side. The *Cau de Spada*, a pointed and rugged hill which terminates this passage, is the last of the chain of savage rocks bounding at this side the dreary valley of Bastan, into which we now entered, and from which we commenced our ascent of the Tourmalet. We wound cautiously up the steep but well cut road which leads up this boundary between the horrid desolation of Bastan and the smiling loveliness of the vale of Campan, the most fertile and pastoral district of the Pyrenees, and not ex-

ceeded in the world for the charms peculiar to regions like it.

As we descended the Tourmalet by its eastern side, the shades of night came on; and the moon, slowly rising before us through a sea of mist, shewed the surrounding hills and vales in many wild distortions of their actual forms and scites, which would have made it impossible for one unaccustomed to mountain wanderings, at all hours and seasons, to recognize the scenes with which he might have formed a noontide familiarity. At times a lake, of as perfect mimicry as ever lived in the deception of a desert mirage, seemed to reflect the moonbeams, and was studded with islands, and diversified with isthmuses, bays, and promontories. The soft southern breeze which blew down from Spain, soon swept away the vapours that produced these effects, and a group of rugged and barren rocks stood bared to the astonished eye. The wildest transformations were thus at once produced by every shifting breeze, and belied

almost as soon in magic change. But all of the party were used to these scenes. Even Malvide had often, in her former mountain sojourn, gazed delightedly at these freaks of elemental illusion; and turning fondly to her lover, she felt proudly sure that his affection knew no variations such as these.

The bubbling source of the Adour sent out its narrow stream to guide us through the valley upon which we now entered. We followed its course until we came to one of those mountain hamlets, the primitive construction of which makes us wonder at the artificial wants of man. Eight or ten of these low and little huts, in which the inhabitants have just room enough to eat and sleep, but the height of which seems to have been formed on man's very lowest measurement, looked brown in the moonlight with their moss-covered walls and faded thatch. A little court-yard enclosed each, surrounded by a rustic peristyle formed of trunks of pine trees, or long stones standing on end, and supporting

a roof of turf, under which the cattle securely reposed. Every thing soundly slept, and we passed through the very centre of the hamlet, without disturbing aught within its limits. We struck off to the right, and stopped for awhile at the foot of a rude wooden cross elevated on a heap of stones, to mark, not the spot where murder had polluted the soil, but where the honest mountaineers might kneel on ground that had been consecrated by many a pious orison. Here my brandy-flask, that constant garniture of my pocket on such expeditions, was emptied of its last drop, for the Spaniards had quite exhausted theirs; and here, poor Ranger, who was the silent companion of all my movements since I mentioned him so many chapters back, finished the last remnant of the provisions which I had managed to secure for his use.

Refreshed once more, we renewed our progress; and leaving the village of Grip to our left, we crossed, in a devious course, the green and cultured slopes which form the first pastur-

ages of the valley of Campan. On casting a last look on the drowsy and moon-lit hamlet, my eye caught the enormous magnitude of the Pic du Midi, frowning blackly down upon the pastoral scene, and threatening to crush it with an immediate fall.

Valley and hill were alternately traversed, until we passed the natural enclosure which contains the celebrated marble quarries of St. Marie; and thence we entered, by a winding path, the pass which communicates between the valleys of Campan and Aure, in the latter of which stands Sarrancolin, the place of our destination. A deep, thick forest now received the path; and scarcely had we plunged into its eternal shades, when a straggling moonbeam, piercing the gloom, seemed to repose upon a rock carved into the form of an antique altar, from which gushed a stream that was immediately lost, as it gurgled its way into the wooded solitudes around us.

The moon lit our path at intervals, and when

THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S SARASVATI MAHAL

we were again left in shade, the steady footsteps of our guides went on in equal security. My footing was not quite so sure; for the carpet which covered the wood and the desert patches that now and then intervened, was of a verdure so smooth that I frequently slipped, and should have fallen had I not given my attention to Malvide, whose pony I steadily held by his rude bridle, but rather supporting myself, than giving security to his safe steps.

As far as I could judge, in the insufficient light of the moon and stars, the fertile beauties of this forest could scarcely be exceeded by those untrodden deserts where all nature's liberality has been lavished. The immense height of the trees, the luxuriant thickness of their foliage, the profusion of climbing plants interlacing them together, the aromatic herbage in thick tufts covering the earth, altogether surpassed all my former experience of the munificence with which nature clothes those unfrequented retreats. Arrived at length at the summit of

the hill which is thickly clothed by this forest, we came suddenly out upon a wild unsheltered desert, with not a shrub, and scarce a blade of herbage to cover the hard earth which forms the soil. Half an hour's walk led us again to a descent which had the advantage of a broad paved way, formed for facilitating the carriage of the trees, transported from the forest to the valley of Aure, into which this precipitous path descends.

A road of infinite beauty led us through a valley which seemed to combine all the varied charms of mountain scenery. I faintly distinguished the wooded sides of the hills which bounded the deep ravine to my left; I heard the river murmuring below; and imagination pictured the splendid gradations of the mountain masses, which I knew to rise up from the ground we trod, in all the sublimity of their nature. But I saw no more. The moon was now lost behind those very mountains; and we passed on in silence and obscurity, close to the

little town of Sarrancolin, without disturbing even the painful monotony of the watch dogs' baying howl, until the four supporters of Don Melchior's couch laid it gently down, on the sloping side of a hill, of safe and easy ascent; and, pointing to a narrow aperture almost overgrown by brambles, one of the men exclaimed,

"This, Señor, is the cave of Sarrancolin."

At the mention of this place, the promised bourn of her expectations, her fatigues, and disappointments, the place where the priest had solemnly engaged to complete her marriage, and secure her happiness, Malvide could not restrain her feelings; but uttering a feeble scream of joy, she flung herself from her pony into Melchior's arms, and in a half expressed hysterical effort would have told him her delight at having reached a harbour of safety. But she could not speak, nor did her emotions require utterance.

"You are worn out, my Malvide, by the fatigue and anxiety of this eventful day. Com-

pose yourself, my love—all our perils are now past—here begins our real happiness."

Don Melchior spoke these words in his most soothing tone; but there seemed to me an air of languid melancholy in his manner, and the effect of the whole scene was painful and oppressive.

"Had we not better enter," said I, "and seek some repose at least, since we are not likely to procure refreshment?"

"Now, Señor," said the former spokesman, "Who goes in first?"

"We will go together," said Malvide to Melchior, in an under tone, having sufficiently understood Spanish to comprehend the question.

"The lady and myself will enter together," replied Melchior.

"That, Señor, is impossible—that is to say, it is impossible to pass the gallery two together, and to descend into the cavern; it must be one at a time. His majesty and his confessor, who are never separate, they say, should separate here or not see the cave of Sarrancolin. This is

the true ground for a divorce (no disparagement to your Excellency's marriage), for a conclave of cardinals could not keep a man and his wife from parting company, between the mouth of the cave and the verge of the precipice within."

The levity of this man's words and manner was not pleasing to any of us, but Malvide was evidently alarmed by it. She shuddered as she looked on the dark mouth of this sanctuary, which it seemed as if despair alone should enter, and she hung back as the soldier offered to take her hand and lead her in. I saw that this was no time to offend these fellows, in whose power we were so completely; so I stepped forward, and proposed entering first to try the fortunes of the way.

"Strike the light then," said the soldier, and one of his comrades immediately obeyed his orders, and a couple of short flambeaux, brought for the occasion, were almost immediately flaring within the cavern's mouth. At the moment of

entering, I cast my eyes back upon the deep glen and the hills above, and I just saw the rosy tinge of light, which hovers over the mountain's verge at the opening of the dawn. In another instant I was in the porch of the subterraneous retreat, the wonders of which we were about to explore.

"Holloa! Who goes there? What's that?" cried one of the men, looking back into the brambles and brush-wood about the entrance. I stepped out for a moment, and heard a noise in the direction to which the man proceeded.

"The devil and his imps!" exclaimed the Spaniard, "what do you think we have here, Pedro? Why, old Father Jose's mule, by the life of my saint, with all his housings and panniers, but all empty. How, in the name of the Virgin, could the beast have wandered here? Wherever his reverence is, he took care to take out the provision, at any rate. Come here, poor fellow, come here, and let me tie you up to this

branch, till we can come out again and put you on your road in search of your master."

Suiting the action to the word, he tied up the mule, and we returned into the gaping aperture.

CHAPTER XX.

The very commencement of the cave presented some difficulty. The pass was narrow, long and rough; and the man who preceded me set the example of groping on hands and knees. Like him I had a torch in one hand, for these necessary auxiliaries had been multiplied several fold. After proceeding in this way about twenty yards, we reached a sloping mass of crystal, six or seven feet high. Up this we scrambled, and found the place above less difficult of passage than that we left behind. The space became now wider and higher, and, opening to the right and left, showed the commencing wonders of the place. The stalactites, of the

consistency of stone or crystal, are numerous and large, and of that amazing regularity in shape and size which would appear the effect of the most measured care in some well skilled architect. Little was wanting to give the perfect appearance of the interior of a gothic chapel; and there can be no doubt but that as the Corinthian order, the most beautiful variety of Grecian architecture, owed its origin to the simple model of a girl carrying a basket of flowers upon her head, so the gothic groups of arch and column were first formed on the plan of spar and stalactite, in natural combinations such as those.

I looked round me, and saw that Melchior and Malvide, with the aid of the remaining men, had passed the first difficulties of the way, and were within the recess which I myself had reached. Malvide looked round, astonished, but evidently ill at ease. Suspicion was working within her sensitive bosom, and preparing her cheeks, which fatigue and agitation had already

robbed of their roses, to receive the light of the torches, on a colouring that assorted with their lurid glare. She looked more like a pale victim in some heathen rite, than a bride in the hectic flush of mingled hope and fear. Don Melchior's exhausted appearance was in sad keeping with her's; and an inconceivable air of wretchedness pervaded the whole scene.

I inwardly execrated the inflexible father who caused this misery; and the whole system of political abuse which nurtured the obstacles of the happiness of this young couple. My thoughts flew back to all the circumstances of their chequered adventures; and reflections on the fanatical opposition to liberty, in which all their distress arose, led, by a natural gradation of thought, to the existence of the *Cordon Sanitaire*, by which all was protected and about to be abetted. Then Sanchez and his murderous weapon flashed before my mental vision—and my eyes fell upon the fierce counterparts in mien and dress of that arch villain, whose arms

and knives might yet be turned to effect the purpose he had so nearly accomplished.

These were the irresistible workings of the mind's misgivings, and the countenances of Melchior and Malvide were eloquent with the expression of a similar train of fancies.

The leader of the soldiers asked, "If we would now move on?"

"On!" exclaimed Malvide to Melchior, "shall we then go further into this desolate place?"

"Yes, yes, my love," replied he, "we must follow our guides—our protectors let me call them— and pursue the path which destiny has pointed out. Lead on, my friend, we are ready?

The way became in a little time narrow, low, and difficult as before. We went slowly forwards, however, carrying from the humid walls a portion of their slimy coat, while droppings from the roof fell upon us, as cold as the icicles they came from. We at length arrived

at the seeming end of this narrow passage, for no egress appeared, but a small cavity which gaped in the wall before us, several feet above the floor we trod on, and apparently almost as difficult to reach as to pass through. Through this, however, the soldier said we were to pass. Malvide hesitated once more. Melchior again consented, and endeavoured to reassure her sinking spirits. I, as before, formed the forlorn hope, and Ranger crawled by me, step for step.

The man who had usually preceded me, now proposed that I should take his place, that he might the more readily assist in my upward movements, and prepare the ropes which were to aid in my descent from the inward precipice, alluded to before by the leader of the party. I accordingly laid down my gun, and climbed the sloping wall, and with some inconvenience passing through the aperture, I was soon enabled to stand up on a solid platform of rock, every thing beyond being thick gloom.

"Steady there!" cried the Spaniard; "ad-

MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASVATI MAHAL THE TANJORE

vance three paces, and you will be dashed to atoms."

Nothing more was wanting to arrest my steps. I stood steadily, holding my dog close to my foot, and he clung to me, as if instinct had warned him of the danger beyond. In a moment or two, the rough hand of the Spaniard appeared through the cavity, thrusting forward a torch which I gladly seized. As I held it above my head and shook it before me from the ledge of rock, its gleam was feebly lost in the thick atmosphere of the apparently immeasurable depths.

The Spaniard and one of his comrades successively joined me where I stood, and they carried a long rope, with various ingenious ties, rudely made, in which they proposed at once to encircle my body, preparatory to my swinging off the ledge into the chasm, at the bottom of which, they told me, was the place of final secrecy and safety.

My own sentiments and sensations being but of auxiliary importance in this record of

adventures, in which I bore only a minor part, I will not dwell on those which I experienced on hearing this proposition. I freely confess that I started with some feeling, not of pleasure certainly; and a curdling thrill *did* seem to move my nerves. Treachery, violence, perpetual imprisonment, and secret murder, were combined in the flash of thought that gleamed through my brain. The monk's absence—my separation from Melchior—the possibility of a design against his liberty or life, and the expediency of putting me out of the way of its execution—Malvide's forlorn situation—and a dozen such harassing reflections, all crowded upon me. My hesitation, however, was but of a moment. It was no time to temporize even with one's own fears; so I delivered myself up, with a careless air, to the operations of those who looked like my executioners.

The rope was fastened well round my chest and under my arms, which were almost pinioned

by the pressure. A torch was placed in one of my hands, with the other I firmly held the rope close above my head; the Spaniards placed their backs against the rock, in a projection of which another torch was stuck, they put their feet closely against the base of the rugged wall, and in an attitude of steady resistance to my weight, as it was to fall below, one of them called out,

"Now, Señor, spring fearlessly and wide."

My mind being wound up to meet what was indisputably dangerous, I felt all that condensed energy of nerve which invariably accompanies such a situation, be the danger what it may, and which gives a sort of wild sentiment of pleasure, totally undefinable. I venture to say that no man ever yet swung from off the ledge of this chasm, even in circumstances less adventurous than those I have described, without experiencing what I now attempt to tell of; and the many travellers who have shrunk from

the appalling plunge, will at least be able to imagine the variety of sensation the thing was likely to produce.

As I took my last step towards the brink, Ranger put his fore paws upon me, and whined as he looked up. I pushed him from me rather rudely with my foot, and I swung off into the thick air of the chasm. As I dangled downwards, the cord slipping gently over the edge of the platform above, a wild and plaintive whine sounded over my head—a loud howl succeeded —and in an instant more, I saw my faithful dog spring from the rock right down into the gloomy gulf. He struck against me as he fell —knocked the torch extinguished from my hand—and was lost to my sight and hearing both together.

I cannot tell the pang that I felt at that moment. To see my old and tried companion dashed to atoms, as it were, in the very act of proving his attachment, without my being able to move a finger for his safety, was torturing

to a degree that may, I think, be conceived by any who ever had a favourite dog. Every thing seemed to swim round, and I thought I never should touch the bottom, which both the Spaniards swore I was close to, at the same time expressing with loud oaths their horror at the fate of my poor Ranger. They stood as close as possible to the edge, and, with their torch extended, strove to light the depths below them. But, in vain; when I touched the bottom, all was impenetrably dark.

I groped cautiously about, on what was, to my surprise, a soft substance unlike earth, calling on Ranger; and I quickly felt his body, which I no sooner touched than his tongue performed its kindest salutation on my outstretched hand. He whined and barked with tones of real delight; and, to my astonishment and joy, he next jumped upon me, covering me with most boisterous caresses. While I was occupied in ascertaining with my hands that he had no broken bones, and wondering how it was possi-

ble for him to be unharmed. Melchior and Malvide had safely reached the platform which I had just quitted, and I saw a rude chair, composed of part of Melchior's litter, which was broken up for the occasion, prepared by the soldiers for my heroine's and her invalided lover's easy descent. I spoke cheeringly from below, telling them that the danger was but imaginary, and promising to assist them as they came swinging down.

While I spoke, a rustling noise near me made me suddenly turn round, and I was instantly laid hold of by a pair of powerful arms, the person vehemently demanding, in Spanish, who and what I was, while I plainly felt the broad sharp blade of the knife he wielded in his hand. I shall be excused for having quite forgotten the answer I made to this rough summons, under circumstances so startling. I said something, however, which, coupled with the sight of those above, satisfied my interlocutor, for he loosed his hold and said,—

"So, so, it's all right I find; but I dreamed that something jumped on me. Here, general, they are come."

At this moment a light in the distant gloom came forward faintly, and in a little more, I was truly rejoiced to observe the tall lank figure of Father Munoz, making its way towards me with a torch held in his hand. He cautiously picked his steps over the rugged obstructions of the spar-strewn floor; and as he came close, I observed a mattress with blankets spread out close to the spot I landed upon, and upon the safe surface of which, with the body of the Spaniard who had slept on it, Ranger had happily fallen, and thus been almost miraculously saved. A couple of baskets of provisions stood close by, and I easily divined, without any explanation, that all these preparations for sleeping, eating, and drinking, were furnished by the provident attention of the monk, and had been borne on the back of the mule which had surprised us on our arrival at the cave.

"Well, I am here before you, my friends," said Father Munoz, addressing at once me, and Melchior, who stood above, and Malvide, whose downward course he anxiously watched, as she was safely lowered in her temporary chair. The monk kept cautiously distant from her, and left to me all the care of safely uncording her from the chair, and of explaining his having out-marched us, and made such careful provision for our wants. In the mean time Melchior was lowered down, and renewed expressions of surprise and gratitude on his part, and that of Malvide, were the best tributes that could be offered to the monk's prompt movements and unceasing energy.

He soon explained to us the ample success of his plan in having divided the party; for the Vicomte, reinforced by some gens-d'armes, had followed at full speed his division, with the false belief of its encircling Don Melchior and his attendant bride. The monk having lured them by the most difficult and almost inaccessible

paths, into the very heart of the pass of Bielsa, struck suddenly at nightfall into a track that wound in a totally contrary direction round the foot of Mount Arbizon. He was accompanied by only two of his party, the remainder keeping up a sham appearance of retreat into Spain, but intending, as soon as it was dark, to return into France, where alone they were secure from the patriot troops; and leaving the Vicomte and his gens-d'armes, fatigued, benighted, and bewildered, to pursue their search or abandon it at their pleasure. Munoz, whose mind possessed the true greatness that attends to little things, directed his course to one of those temporary encampments of his own unfortunate and vagabond followers which were scattered through the mountains; and there he procured from fat Father José, a Capuchin of orthodox dimensions, wine, bread, and meat, (although it happened to be on a Friday) with a couple of mattresses, bolsters, and covering, and mules for himself and his attendants. Ar-

rived at the cave, one of these men was sent back with the unladen mules; and it appeared that one of *them* thought proper to break loose from his controul, and that it still wandered about the hills.

"Now, my friends, repose yourselves awhile, take some refreshments, banish all fear, return thanks to the Providence that has protected you, and then, without delay, we will proceed to solemnize the holy contract which makes you one in the sight of Heaven, and which man can never, in conscience, annul."

So spoke Father Munoz. Melchior and Malvide looked their approbation, with happier faces than they had lately shewn. I ventured to ask after Felix and the issue of his embassy.

"I have heard nothing of him," said the monk, "but I have sent a trusty guide to await him at the appointed place, and I doubt not he will soon arrive, with or without the object of his attempt."

Several torches were now lighted, two of the

men came down with all the apparatus of Don Melchior's litter, and the contents of the baskets were soon displayed on tables of crystal blocks that offered themselves conveniently to our use. We all ate fast, and some of us heartily; I was amongst the latter number, but the lovers seemed to dispatch their portion of the meal less from appetite than anxiety to remove the obstacle which retarded the ceremony, the completion of which they so much longed for.

The place in which we were was but a sort of vestibule to the grand chamber of the cave. It was vaulted, high, and narrow, with imperfect pillars formed of stalactites, but almost all defaced and broken off by the curious travellers who had descended, or by the mountaineers who carried pieces away to sell to those who declined the expedition. Our repast concluded, the monk, in one of his most solemn tones, exclaimed,

"Now to the chapel, my friends!" and he had once more his frequent air of a man wholly

wrapped up and abstracted in considerations of his sacred functions.

We all stood up. I offered an arm to Melchior, who at the other side, was half supported by and half supporting Malvide. Two of the men preceded us with a torch in every hand; the monk moved forward next, similarly furnished, and we three brought up the rear, thus lighted on. But as we were about to enter into another of those narrow galleries which form the communication between the several caves, a sound of voices above, in apparent altercation, arrested our progress. Malvide attempted to rush forward, but the anxious curiosity of the monk kept him stationary, and the leaders also stopt short.

"Not another step will I move—you're choking me—the rope has slipped up upon my throat—murder, murder!" exclaimed the squeaking voice of Monsieur Depourvu.

"Not at all, my dear Sir," said Felix,

whom the light of the torch, left in the wall, now discovered, with his back to us as he stood on the platform, hauling up his companion through the cavity—"Not at all—it's absolutely nothing when one's used to it—pray now shove yourself up a little."

"I can't, I won't—I'll stick here, I'm determined on it. A church indeed! a pretty church! Take this infernal bandage off my eyes, Felix—I am sure you are about to murder me—don't pull me so—I am choking—murder, murder!"

But in the last throe the cavity disgorged its unwilling occupant, for he was lugged safely upon the platform, where he immediately sprang upon his feet.

"Where am I, then?" cried he, struggling fiercely with Felix and one of the Spaniards who re-adjusted the rope round his body. "Tell me where I am; you said we were coming into a church, but you've dragged me into a charnel

vault, I'm sure of it. I'm all wet and torn to atoms, in these vile passages. Where am I, Felix?"

"Hold fast by the rope and you'll soon know," replied Felix (who had taken information of the place from his guide), pushing him clear off the platform; and down he came, swinging and screaming with all his might, accompanied by a shriek from Malvide, a burst of hoarse laughter from the Spaniards, above and below, and the loud barking of Ranger, all of which discord was echoed drearily through the cavern.

Even when Depourvu touched the ground he was quite unsatisfied as to his safety. He screamed more violently than before, jumped about, rolled his head from side to side; while loud complaints and curses proclaimed that he believed himself to be actually hanging by his neck, and that he was thus in the very act of being barbarously murdered by Felix and the Spaniard. While one of the soldiers

uncorded him and kept him somewhat more quiet, the monk gave the signal for our proceeding into the inner chamber of the vault.

Not a word was spoken that could betray the party to Depourvu. We walked silently forward through the narrow and difficult path, at each side of which was a deep and dark abyss. We proceeded with the greatest caution, for one false step to the right or left would have plunged us into certain destruction. Felix, after some persuasion, prevailed on Depourvu to suffer his eyes to remain bandaged, promising him most faithfully that a few minutes would bring him into the chapel, where he should certainly pounce upon Malvide, in the very fact of matrimony with his Spanish rival. The conversation went on:—

Depourvu. Oh, Felix, if I could but be sure of that, I would forgive you all, all this horrid treatment. If I could but catch her in the fact! then my hundred thousand francs would be safe, even though she won't marry me.

Felix. (eagerly.) What hundred thousand francs?

Here we all stopped with a simultaneous anxiety.

Depourvu. Why, the money I lent to the Vicomte to be sure—the amount of the bond.

Felix. (recovering himself.) Ay, ay, to be sure, that is very true; but what bond?

Depourvu. Why, the bond you witnessed, what other?

Felix. That *I* witnessed!

Depourvu. Come, come, Master Felix, don't be so cunning—It's no use between us. The Vicomte told me that he told you to tell me that he had not told you any thing about it. But I have the bond safe and sound in my port-folio, in this very pocket, for all that.

Felix. The devil you have?

Depourvu. Ay, snug; and I'll have my money back, every sous, great a fool as he takes me for.

Felix. Now, will you do me a favour, Monsieur Depourvu.

Depourvu. I'll do any thing on earth, in reason for you, if you'll but shew me Malvide and that pale whiskerandos of a Spaniard in the act and fact of being married.

Felix. Then I pledge myself to shew them to you in less than five minutes, with the priest tying them together, if you will let me see that bond which I never read, though it appears I witnessed it.

Depourvu. Appears! Egad, it does plain enough, for your name is to it—Felix Domps—hard enough to read to be sure, for it is a miserable scrawl. Take off the bandage from my eyes, and here is the bond.

Felix. No, no. *You* don't want to see it, and my own eyes will serve *my* purpose—and you know our compact is broken when you are no longer blindfolded

Depourvu. That's very good reasoning, certainly—so here, take it—I trust to your honour.

Felix. (examining the bond.) What an impudent scrawl, in imitation of my fine running

hand—well, I did not think my master was quite such a scoundrel.

Depourvu In *imitation!* What do you mean by that?

Felix. Oh, nothing, nothing at all.

Depourvu. And what do you mean by a *scoundrel?*

Felix. Oh, that's less than nothing.

Depourvu. Indeed! But you see the clause for repayment?

Felix. (reading.) Yes, yes, clear enough. "To be repaid with the hundred thousand francs, the portion of my daughter Malvide, on her marriage with the said Monsieur Depourvu; and if he does not fulfil the said contract of marriage, but marries another person, the said Vicomte d'Euplandre to refund the sum of one hundred thousand francs to said Monsieur Depourvu." Ay, all very clear and explicit.

Depourvu. Yes, Felix, you see that, either way, I have secured the repayment of the money—you observe that.

MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI MAHAL LIBRARY

Felix. (*knowingly.*) Neither way, you mean.

Depourvu. (*alarmed.*) Why, what do *you* mean? Speak out, Felix; pray don't keep me in suspense; and just take this bandage from my eyes.

Felix. Do keep cool, my dear Sir, and answer me one question,—who drew out this bond?

Depourvu. Who? Why myself to be sure; you know it was all a secret between the Vicomte and myself, and you who witnessed it.

Felix. Then I'll tell you what, Monsieur Depourvu, your one hundred thousand francs are utterly lost, and for ever.

Depourvu. What, how? What do you mean? Pray take off this infernal bandage, and let me look at you, to see if you are serious.

Felix. I'm quite serious, I assure you.

Depourvu. Then I'm very seriously ill—so do, like an honest fellow, hold me up awhile, and explain yourself.

Felix. (*supporting him.*) Well, now, listen to

me. You see, in the first place, that had Mademoiselle Malvide married you, the Vicomte's debt was to be paid with the marriage portion; that is to say, you were to receive the portion in lieu of the debt.

Depourvu. Not at all; at the same time with it.

Felix. No, no, to be repaid *with* the marriage portion: not a word of "at the same time;" but *with*, with the portion Monsieur Depourvu, which means *by* the portion.

Depourvu. Do you know, it never struck me in that way.

Felix. I dare say, but rely on it, it is the construction of the clause.

Depourvu. Then I now finally give up all notion of marrying her—totally—I would not have her if she asked me—I would'nt indeed.

Felix. Very well; but then if she marries another person?

Depourvu. Why, then I get back my money, and that's what I want—I don't want a wife; I would much rather live single.

Felix. But, my good Sir, depend upon it you'll have neither wife nor money, your bond is not worth a *liard.*

Depourvu. You don't say so—pray do'nt! How do you mean, Felix?

Felix. Why, in the first place, being drawn up by yourself, and my name being forged to it, the Vicomte would deny its authenticity, and swear you have fabricated it altogether; for if he signed this name it is only like a clumsy imitation of his general style of writing—and I firmly believe you would be prosecuted and sent to the gallies for life.

This awful climax produced a really serious effect upon poor Depourvu. He shook as if in an ague, and seemed to breathe with difficulty. We all made signs to Felix to take off his bandage, but he was inexorable to our signals and the sufferer's prayers, and only motioned to us to go on. We obeyed his signal, for he proved himself so good a general as to be en-

titled to obedience: and as we moved forward I caught the pleased expression of my companions' countenances, but Malvide's shewed, I thought, a feeling of disgrace, and Melchior's one of disgust at the discovery of the Vicomte's baseness. We heard Felix following us, step by step with his companion, whose nervous whispers died away in the dark echos of the passage.

We very soon reached the chamber to which the passage led; and the torches, held high up by the attendant soldiers, shewed us all that can be seen of this extraordinary place. It differed but little in the appearance usual to such caverns, but, like most others, it was rich in the abounding wonders of Nature's subterranean works. Pillar and arch were there displayed, as if in mockery of art's supposed inventions; and the vaulted roof accorded with the vast yet graceful proportions of the rest. Many fantastic accessories presented themselves—altar, bench, and benitier. On high the columns of impending stalactites, shewed what might be thought the pipes of a

gigantic organ, and the ear seemed involuntarily listening for some sacred strain. A misty solemnity enveloped the whole of the visible scene; while beyond a broken and perilous causeway, both sight and imagination were baffled in the depths of a yawning and as yet unfathomed gulph.

All in all, it was a place suited for the solemnization of mysterious rites—a rich wrought sanctuary, for the victims, whom persecution might in darker times have driven from the temple raised by man, and whose faith required a worship place less broadly marked than the mountain side, the forest depths, earth's wide spread surface, and the universal vault of Heaven.

While my eye took in the scene here sketched, the soldiers ranged their torches on what looked an altar; the monk placed himself before it, and drew forth his book. Malvide and Melchior once more knelt; and Munoz's sonorous voice commenced again the ceremony,

which the morning's interruption had left incomplete.

Felix and Depourvu now appeared, the latter stealing in on tiptoe, holding his companion's arm with both hands, and advancing with his right ear foremost, as if that was the side most adapted for catching the priest's accents.

"Aha! they are at it! we have caught them! Oh, my dear Felix—my best, my only friend!" exclaimed he.

"Hush!" murmured Felix, untying the cotton pocket handkerchief, which had been bound round his eyes, "hush! and I will give you ocular proof."

When the bandage fell off, and the glare of the torches flashed upon Depourvu, he looked utterly bewildered and half blinded. He rubbed his eyes, shook his head, and opened his mouth to swallow the reality of what he saw: and when he clearly distinguished what appeared to him an indubitable church, the monk in his canoni-

cals, book in hand, and the grim looking attendants who surrounded the torch-lit altar, he dropped down on his knees, in a fit of mingled piety and fright, uttering loud thanksgivings for his present safety, and prayers for his future preservation. But Felix whispered a few cabalistical words into his ear, and he instantly jumped up on his feet, clapped his hands loudly together, and cried out,

"Certainly, to be sure, without doubt, with the greatest pleasure—I shall be charmed, enchanted."

"Enough, enough," said Felix, putting his hand across Depourvu's mouth, from which, imperfect reiterations of his delighted compliance, burst forth through the prison bars of Felix's fingers.

"Enough, I tell you!" exclaimed Felix, stamping fiercely, and frowning like the keeper of some half-tamed animal—"leave the rest to me."

He then advanced towards the monk,

and said, loud enough to be heard by Depourvu,

"Most reverend father, and you, Sir, and Mademoiselle, excuse my interruption; but permit me to offer, on the part of Monsieur Depourvu, his anxious request that you will suffer him to fill the station which this lady's father has abandoned, and which no such old and faithful friend as he is, is here to occupy. He proposes to himself, in short, the honour of giving her away."

Through the compliance given instantly to this proposal by the three persons applied to, I plainly saw the workings of dissatisfaction at the rather degrading necessity which forced them to accept it. I myself could not help shrinking from the mockery which Depourvu was about to enact—but I saw that the others as well as myself were deeply impressed with the importance of his being involved so thoroughly, by this voluntary relinquishment

of his own claim, and the sanction afforded to Melchior's having replaced him.

The ceremony therefore went on without one dissentient voice. Malvide and Melchior were joined to each other for ever, and Depourvu gave away the treasure, with as much alacrity as if he had been throwing away a plague.

CHAPTER XXI.

The knot which ties a hero and heroine together, too often unravels the interest which the story-teller has been endeavouring to wind up. As nearly as possible to that point, then, he should stop. All readers like to have something left to the imagination; and what so generally pleasing to speculate on as the joys of the newly married—their dangers and difficulties over; for though such may even then appear palpable to common observers, they have no existence for *them.* Leaving, then, the now hallowed mysteries of Sarrancolin to the occupation of these their sole possessors, I will beg my readers to accompany me on a mission of no

small importance, which I undertook at the united solicitation of all the party, and in which, at my suggestion, Monsieur Depourvu and Felix bore a part. This was no other than an embassy of explanation and conciliation to the Vicomte d'Euplandre.

I shall not dwell on the details of this somewhat delicate undertaking. I got through the task to the best of my ability, and only lamented that that did not equal my zeal. But, considering all circumstances, I procured tolerably good terms for the friends I represented, and whose cause I pleaded. I proceeded to the Vicomte's residence near Toulouse; and, introduced by Felix, seconded by Depourvu, I detailed the particulars of the union, which no opposition was able to prevent, and which it was now vain to endeavour to annul. I found myself listened to with a degree of patience which I had not looked for; and I discovered the Vicomte to be one of those reasonable persons who submit patiently when resistance is vain, and

who put on smiles when nothing is to be gained by frowns. He was, therefore, not inflexible to my remonstrances, and he consented to forgive Malvide, though he persisted in condemning her conduct. He also very clearly proved his honesty, by refunding Monsieur Depourvu's one hundred thousand francs (which he had only borrowed as a kind of pledge for his completing his offer of marriage with Malvide); and he strengthened Felix's assertions of his own cleverness by confirming the confession of the latter that he had denied his signature as witness to the bond, merely as a trick to frighten Dépourvu into a belief of fraud, and a participation in the marriage rites. The *honourable* nature of the Vicomte's intentions was made evident to me, and I was fain to take that conviction as sufficient grounds for giving a portion of esteem to a character in which I could find nothing more to demand admiration or excite regard. However, as human nature is too

often found, the Vicomte might hold his head as high as his fellows.

Malvide's mother readily joined in my efforts to propitiate the severer parent, who was reasonable enough to make a merit of compliance with entreaties he could no longer resist. My visit to the Château d'Euplandre was thus one of pleasure to myself and the great majority of the party concerned; and a full and free pardon was the next day despatched to Sarrancolin by the indefatigable Felix, I staying behind, at the earnest invitation of the Vicomte, to assist in preparations for the reception of the bride and bridegroom, and for the solemnization of the *civil* part of the ceremony, without which the matter-of-fact observances of French forms in such cases would be incomplete.

In due course of time Don Melchior and Malvide arrived at the paternal mansion; and with as little delay as was consistent with the requisite rules, the engagement already sanc-

tified by religion was sanctioned by law. Malvide's beautiful head was bound in its bridal wreath of orange flowers, emblematic of the fragrant blossoming of joy within her heart. The young couple hurried off immediately to Paris, anxiously escaping from the cold quarantine of etiquette, to which new married happiness is too commonly condemned in France. Felix was added to their establishment, at his and their joint request, their confidence and his fidelity being thus mutually guaranteed and rewarded.

Monsieur Depourvu retired into the solitude of unwedded life, well pleased at having escaped the risks of matrimony, with security to the *other* money which had been, as he thought, in such jeopardy. I never happened to hear whether or not he again tried the perils of courtship, and am thus forced to hand him fairly over as another subject of interest to the "imagination of the reader."

After the departure of Don Melchior and

his bride, there was nothing left to detain me in the part of France to which they and their adventures had hitherto imparted a charm. The whole horizon of politics was obscured, and little hope could be rationally entertained that the frontier line would be much longer held sacred. Winter was fast approaching, and all inducements to a prolonged stay in the neighbourhood of the Pyrenees were daily decreasing. I therefore finally turned my back on the magnificent mountains, the first appearance of which had excited such lively sensations of admiration, and where I had at intervals passed so many days of adventurous delight. I parted from them as from a home, and my mind turns at times to their recollection with feelings almost domestic.

Father Munoz, still wildly enthusiastic in the cause of bigotry and despotism, returned again to the scene of his former operations. Having fulfilled, with that sublimity of devotion of which enthusiasts alone are susceptible, the

duties so loudly claimed by friendship, and which were silently prompted by the other mysterious passion that he scarcely ventured to recognize, he felt that he could devote himself wholly to the mighty slavery in which he was self-enthralled. He passed some months in organizing a large body of the scattered wretches whose former ruin he had shared, and at their head he returned in the following spring into the unfortunate land of his birth, leading on the invaders, before whose irresistible march the hopes of freedom were for a long enduring season crushed.

This woeful consummation realized, Munoz once more laid down his sword, and retired to his re-established convent, to display that mixture of worth with fanaticism so injurious to the character of true virtue, by giving it the appearance of *relationship* with the evil to which it is only *allied*.

About the period at which the monk thus returned to the comparative seclusion of his con-

vent I happened to be in Paris, and I heard of his retirement from public life in the following manner. Walking on the Boulevards alone, a group of officers of a regiment just returned from Spain approached me. One of them sprang forward, with infinite agility and somewhat of a theatrical air, enfolded me in his arms, and impressed on either cheek a most cordial salutation from his moustached and whiskered countenance. His epaulette struck me in the eye, and his hat fell upon the ground. I quickly recognized my old friend, Serjeant Passepartout, in his well-earned promotion to the rank of sub-lieutenant; and I gazed with pleasure on the ribbon of the Legion of Honour which protruded puffingly from his button-hole. He briefly sketched to me the rapid campaign of the French army, their bravery and moderation. I acknowledged the truth of all he said, and sorrowfully thought of the results of their triumphs. "As for me," said he, "I fought my way straight forward, going out of it a little at

times for the sake of the dear creatures whom I took *en Echellon*. I did some things which my colonel approved—he recommended me to the general—and the latter asked me whether I would have an epaulette or the cross?*

"Neither, General," said I, "until I am entitled to both—and *pardi*, my friend, you see I have got both!"

A few details about Munoz, and some extracts from the journal of his own amours closed our conference. I wished him joy of his promotion, and a continuance of good luck in love and war; and I left him to the indulgence of what he had already obtained. But I must go back a little to persons and scenes of greater interest.

Don Melchior gradually recovered from the effects of the villain Sanchez's poignard. He awaited in Paris the last hour of hope for the neutrality of France in the coming contest, of

* The decoration of the Legion of Honour.

which Spain was to be the theatre and her sons the actors. He watched with ardent anxiety the progress of every measure of conciliation on the one hand, and of repulsive disdain on the other. He could make no allowance in that moment of excitement—and what friend of freedom could?—for the secret instinct which might have whispered the court of the Tuileries that its very existence was at stake, and that to temporize was to be lost—that every thing must be ventured and a blow boldly struck, even though the first principles of liberty were the victims.

Melchior viewed, in the bitterness of his feelings, but one aspect of this double-faced transaction. He execrated the principles, and he wished to defy the power that was in march against his country. He looked on the troops that were intended for its invasion with real aversion and would-be contempt—and remembering only what the French guards had been when he served in them himself, he gazed on them now with feelings as violent as they were

in truth unjust; for soldiers must strike when governments command, and if military force deliberates, civil freedom is lost.

Melchior outstaid the departure of the Ambassador of Constitutional Spain; he attended the review of the French troops, destined for the final reinforcements, on the arrival of which at the frontier, the *cordon sanitaire* was to commence its fatal inroad, and in the bitterness of his heart he wrote some verses during his preparations, on that last day, for quitting Paris, as he vowed for ever. These I have translated as follows, using a liberty with them as if they were my own, by suppressing one or two passages which subsequent circumstances proved to be individually unjust.

ON THE MARCH OF THE FRENCH GUARDS FOR THE INVASION OF SPAIN.

There they stand in their triple ranks,
  In the Bourbon palace yard;
Playthings for each new tyrant's pranks,
Slaves, soldiers, hirelings, Gauls or Franks,
  The Bourbon royal guard.

I saw them once, when *another* name
 Flung its mighty shadow o'er;
When these sons of war were heirs of fame,
And glory's rays, not the rust of shame,
 Were spread on the chains they bore.

How different was their bearing then
 To their crest-fallen brows to-day!
They looked as they ne'er shall look again,
Like demi-gods more than mortal men,
 Drawn out in their fierce array.

By heavens, 'twas grand to see them spring
 Elastic from the ground,
And to hear the wide courts echoing
As they yelled the name of their Emperor king,
 And the clash of their arms went round.

And they seemed, as they waved their helms on high,
 And swung their glittering blades,
And swept in clouds their chieftain by,
Less things of the world than spirits of the sky,
 Or warriors from the shades.

While HE, as he sat on his war-horse there,
 Wrapped in his shroud of pride,
Might be thought some demon of the air,
In the gloomy grandeur of despair,
 The whirlwind's course to guide.

And is that fearful pageant gone,
Has it vanished from the earth;
Have the thousands that then rushed wildly on,
Sunk in the grave with the mighty one
Who gave their terrors birth?

And what are those ranks that I gaze on now?
And whose is yon shrivelled form,
That shivering stands, with cringing bow,
Like a dripping bird on some vessel's prow,
That heralds yet hides from the storm.

* * * *

* * * *

Not a shout is raised, not a feeble smile
Plays over one lowering front,
Not a joke goes round the hours to beguile,
Not a prayer is breathed from a single file
That must brave the battle's brunt.

And mark! they move, with sluggard tramp,
Hollow, and dull, and slow,
The ground gives back the heavy stamp
Of limbs, whose nerves seemed coiled with cramp,
So limping and lame they go.

And whither go they?—Ha, hold your sides,
Each laughter-loving fiend
That plunges men down fate's whelming tides,
That tears young bridegrooms from their brides,
That mocks, in storm-clouds screened,

At all the miseries of mankind,
  Drifting on passion's seas,
Like a rudderless bark before the wind,
When despots dark and bigots blind
  Urge on such things as these.

Let every urchin sprite laugh out,
  That sports with mortal's pain,
While demons dire send back the shout,
Fierce bursting round the inglorious rout
  That goes to conquer Spain!!

Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!
  The demon-chorus flies,
Hurra! hurra! hurra! hurra!
Echoes o'er Spain, while the loud huzza!
  Of her legioned hosts replies,

"Come on," they cry, "ye men of France,
  "Come tyrants with your hordes!
"Fit light shall shine o'er your advance,
"Liberty's broad and burning glance,
  "And the gleam from freemen's swords.

"Fit welcome shall wait on each mountain height,
  "Strong arms and new-dug graves,
"And your requiem song be the croaking flight
"Of eagles, and ravens, and birds of the night,
  "O'er the carcasses of slaves!"

From the first skirmish on the banks of the Bidassoa till the last assault against the ramparts of Cadiz, Don Melchior was one of the foremost to oppose the invaders. I had several letters from him during this career of dismal glory, amid the fluctuations of hope and despondency. He clung wildly to the first, while even one shred remained. But the energies of Spain were paralyzed under the withering influences of bigotry, and her patriots were scattered before its baneful breath. Riego, the brightest, the purest of them all, hung as a vile felon in the polluted streets of the capital he had entered a hero, and the hearts of all that were liberal in Europe sickened with sorrow and swelled with indignation at the news.

From that sad moment the political mind contained no atmosphere in which hope for Spain could breathe. It was stifled perhaps to rise again! But the chequered ray of freedom which gleamed on her for awhile, shewed the glorious aspect of a just revolution, rising in simple

grandeur, upheld by dignified moderation, and sinking undefiled by crime—a fine inheritance to the days to come! a splendid contrast to that of France, that frantic burst of national despair, whose fatal example, by terrifying half the world with the memory of its horrors, ensures the degradation of the other, from apprehension of their return.

But the revolution of Spain has gone far to counteract this effect; and after-ages will look back to it, as the model for those up-risings against the abuse of power, of which the weakness of human natures causes the too frequent necessity. It is for us to do honour to those immortal men who proved that success is not necessary to constitute a hero; and in freely granting to them that proud title, I need not supplicate for *mine* the honour that is shared by all who perished nobly in battle or suffered gloriously in exile.

Don Melchior de Travazos was among the latter. His last farewell to hapless Spain had

scarcely died away across the wide waters which he traversed, when regenerated Colombia hailed him with her welcome, and years are passing over not too swiftly for his fame, for every one showers down new honours on his head.

And she—my heroine—need my readers be told of her? Will they ask who shared his perils, and participates in his happiness? Who soothed his anguish in defeat, and brightened the triumph of his victories? Who wandered with him hand in hand—felt with him heart in heart—and reposes with him side by side?

NOTE.

The *Cagots* of all France must have had a common origin. Some one great cause must have banished and fixed them to the most obscure and barren places. Some signal act of vengeance, some wide-spreading, national outlawry, must at once have aimed at the very extermination of the whole. Whether sudden, or continuous, it must have been great and general; imprinting at once upon all France the same sentiments of hatred, fixing on the proscribed the stamp of the same reprobation, and loading them with the opprobrium of a common name, the universal signal of horror and contempt.

But examining the causes to which this fate was formerly ascribed, it can scarcely be believed that these poor people owe their existence to a tribe of Lepers, banished from the haunts of health and happiness. Lepers were

frequently exiled, and confined within the limits of their own infection, but never sold or bequeathed. Nor is it probable that they are descended from a portion of the Gauls, reduced to this state of debasement by the barbarians who succeeded the Roman power. Under the Goths and Francs, the condition of the Gauls presented nothing like this state of unmitigated infamy. It is the aversion that remains to be explained, not the tyranny. Slaves may be spurned, but the Cagot was proscribed. It is the mixture of vengeance and contempt which is so inexplicable; for cruelty is commonplace; and hatred, like the eagle that carries up its prey, to dash it down to a more certain death, seems to elevate the object it is about to destroy. The misery in question must have had its source in some feeling more deep and deadly than is to be fathomed by vulgar conjecture, or ambiguous research. It is therefore that all authorities are unanimous in ascribing it to the effect of some such event as the conflict of two ferocious nations—a barbarous invasion punished by barbarians—or the terrible reaction of slavery against oppression.

But five centuries of massacres and devastation, rife with bloody battles, oppressions, and treasons, where crimes and miseries succeeded each other in atrocious monotony,

leave all in doubt and confusion, as to the epoch or the event. The east, the north, and south had in their turns, poured upon Gaul a multitude of hordes, all sprung from Upper Asia, but subdivided and modified, and at length utterly forgetting their common origin and relationship. Of these barbarians, the last which burst from their eastern homes were the most barbarous. They pressed on those which went immediately before, who in their turn drove on their predecessors. Alani, and Suevi, and Vandals, gave place to the Goths and Francs; and, stopped by the Western Ocean, they doubled back upon their course and ravaged Gaul. The Huns came next, accompanied by the Herules, new tribes of Alani, and another race of Suevi. All were confounded together in Gaul, which seemed to be the boundary of their incursions. Then from the North came the Saxons; new Vandals from their side; and the people of Germany, the most confused mixture of all these confused masses, precipitated themselves into the universal tumult; and the divisions, dispersions, annihilations, and reproductions of races were complete.

At length, an issue was discovered on the side of Spain. A furious torrent of men rushed out between the Pyrenees and the Mediterranean; and in the midst of new massacres and

new confusion, they found out the road to Africa, where they came into contact with the Romans, battled successfully against the last struggles of their power, and reposed on the ruins of their Empire, when a fresh inundation burst from the south upon the west. The ferocious Vandals, now emasculated by pleasure, wealth, and luxury, were shaken and overthrown; while the Moors, following up their course, swept before them the Goths of Spain, and, led by the fierce and redoubtable Ben Nazir, fell with their whole weight on the Empire of the Francs, by whom they were finally checked and overthrown.

And which, amongst this multitude of tribes, must be selected as that which has been condemned to bear, for generation after generation, the progressive miseries and marks of degradation? Hardly may we distinguish by the flickering lights of history, the victors in these perpetual conflicts—how then are we to trace the ruins of the vanquished? Does the outlawed caste which we now treat of descend from the remnant of the 300,000 men reputed to have been slain in the plains of Orleans in 451, when the Huns and Ostrogoths were destroyed or dispersed by the Visigoths, the Gauls and Francs?—or from the Visigoths, defeated twelve years later by Childeric?—or from the

fugitives of the memorable battle of Vouglé, in 507, which cemented the foundations of the throne of Clovis?—or finally, from the deplorable remains of the multitude of Saracens, almost annihilated in the eighth century, by Charles Martel, in the neighbourhood of Tours?

These are the questions successively propounded by the authors who have given their attention to this interesting, but hopeless speculation. Opinion may fix itself with equal probability on any one of these transactions. The theatre of all these grand defeats was near the centre and western parts of France, giving equal facilities to the different directions which the vanquished followed in their respective flights. The number of the combatants on all these occasions renders conceivable, at least, the extent of country covered by their dispersion. The general feeling which animated France, upon the occasion of these momentous events, may explain the equality of wretchedness entailed upon each separate portion of the proscribed. But difficulties arise in the various natures of the different sufferers in these defeats, which forbid the application of the same reasoning to all of them alike.

It would too much extend the subject, which this brief sketch is intended to simplify and not confuse, were I to

transcribe the various reasonings which exist upon each favourite opinion, which gives the preference in this inquiry to the Goths, the Alani, or the Moors. The total incertitude in which the question is enfolded renders it one of hopeless investigation, and the only object to be gained in pursuing it is amusement, at the proofs which each writer discovers for his favourite theory, and the objections he invents to that of his opponents. No glory can be at any rate acquired for these unfortunate people in proving them descendants of any race from whom they *must* have degenerated, and a mass of retrospective disgrace must be thrown upon the memory of any people, in supposing them at any time to have borne such a possible debasement.

END OF THE CAGOT'S HUT.

SEEING IS NOT BELIEVING.

"Is this a dream, now, after my first sleep? or are these phant'sies made i' the light heart?"

BEN JONSON'S *New Inn*.

SEEING IS NOT BELIEVING.

CHAPTER I.

Since I first began to use my pen for the purpose of scribbling for the public, one of my most ardent wishes has been to write a Ghost Story; but I have been long withheld, by a notion that the supernatural was worn out, as a means not merely of terror, but of entertainment. It still, no doubt, possesses among my contemporaries many powerful supporters; but reason seems fast exercising the spirits engendered by imagination, and the millennium of good sense—or perhaps of commonplace—has fairly commenced upon earth. It is certain that the mar-

vellous has lost its sway among us. A religion, severe in proportion to its purity, has shattered the prism which shewed us, in a thousand varying colours, the brilliant fancies of the old mythology. The fictions of the middle ages, too, creations of popular credulity, rather than of religious awe, illusions less imposing but far more pleasing, lose, in the hands of modern writers, all their grace and elasticity. They become the inanimate puppets of a showman, not aërial beings of the brain—degenerate offspring of a celestial race, which seems ill at ease in the lowly habitations of mortality.

The secret is, that we have lost our faith in those charming superstitions; the materialised enjoyments of the times no longer sympathize with the phantoms of romance; and the author who would weave a web of magic, in which he has no belief, must manage with a heavy touch the vapoury essences of fairy land. I confess myself to observe the change with regret; for I consider superstition, in all its modified forms,

to be widely distinct from *ignorance*, inasmuch as it has been shared by many of the wisest and most learned; and I look on it as one of the safest minor means for the government of what must ever be a large portion of mankind. A superstition of some sort, seems a natural want of the mind; and the history of human nature proves the continual changes of the object, but no abatement of the principle. But a grosser species of enchantment than spirits or genii, is required to charm the incredulity of the sceptic world *we* move in; and the austerity of knowledge, which disdains the array of goblin impositions, is not proof against that dread of spectral agency, which religion sanctifies, and at which even philosophy involuntarily shudders. Trusting, then, to the existence of this instinct, interwoven with our nature, I venture to record the progress of a story, full of mystery, not merely superhuman, but of that tangible texture which arouses all our flesh-and-blood sensibilities.

The heavy tongue of the cathedral clock had just struck nine, when I entered the town of La Rochelle, in that part which joins the sea, on the road from Rochefort. It was late in the month of November, with neither moon nor stars to light my path. A westerly wind, blowing strongly from the ocean, joined itself with the hoarse voice of the tide, upon the huge mound that protects the harbour, and, rushing through the town, swung to and fro the large lanterns, suspended at long intervals across the streets, making their lights flicker dismally, and their fastenings creak like the chains of a gibbet. Every thing was an illustration of the dreary animation of a country town at night, in the fall of the year. The shop-doors were closed; but a drowsy lamp or candle (here and there) half betrayed the miserable merchandize within. A couple of carts were dragged heavily over the pavement, by horses which seemed to walk in their sleep; and a few straggling old women, or tired artizans, were plodding along in search of

their supper or their homes. The streets were dirty, and in the centre of one of them a poor little Savoyard was grinding the mournful discord of his viol before a solitary house, which, by its paucity of lights, gave no symptoms of society within.

I never saw altogether a more perfect picture of dreariness. A town wholly uninhabited would have been less painfully so. Even the wild marshes I had been shooting across till sunset were less desolate, for there fancy had full play—but *here* imagination lay utterly stagnant. Ranger, who had joyously bounded and frolicked all day, got close to me, as we entered this cheerless place, and he and I trudged along in silent and dull companionship.

Being quite a stranger to the town, it was mere chance that led me to the quay; and the first decent looking inn which caught my eye being situated there, I was not long in choosing my quarters for the night. It was not that the aspect of the house was peculiarly inviting, for

it looked lonely enough, and of the second or third rate order of *auberge*; but I was fatigued, and out of spirits for the more bustling scenes of those houses where diligences, pataches, and other public conveyances, are wont to stop. A quiet bed and a good night's rest were more to my mind than seeking adventures or observing characters; so I walked into the kitchen, which opened upon the gateway and had its windows fronting the quay.

The air of this room was peculiarly cheerless and oppressive. It was lighted by one tall dim candle, standing on a table in a corner. There was a wretched fire in the wide hearth, at one side of which dozed a fat old woman of about sixty years of age; and at the other a man, full one third older, emaciated, and sickly looking, was fast asleep, bent down almost into the ill-burning fagots, which cast their faint glare on his white cotton nightcap and wrinkled face. I paused for a while near the door, uncertain that I had not mistaken the private residence of a

forlorn old couple for a house of public resort. But on looking inquiringly round the room, I observed a man lying on a bench. He was also apparently asleep; but on observing my hesitation, he said, in a careless way, "Come in, Sir, come in, don't be afraid."

Upon this invitation I walked forward, and took possession of an arm chair which stood before the fire. The man who addressed me stood up, and came yawningly forward.

"Can I have a bed here for the night, my friend?" asked I.

"You must be a stranger in La Rochelle to ask that question," replied he; "you may have seven very good ones if you want them."

"What, is your house quite empty?"

"With the exception of yourself and the family, I hope." There was a careless sort of significance in this reply that did not strike me much at the time; and I remarked to the man that every thing I saw in the house bore the appearance of great drowsiness.

"No wonder," replied he; "this is the third night of watching, and nothing is come yet." The last words were accompanied by a sleepy smile, and my notion was that they must bear some allusion to the arrival of those smuggling boats, which come constantly into the harbours on the French western coast, and for the crews of which the house seemed quite suited. My companion, on the present occasion, was a kind of sailor-like person, half waiter, half master, and, as I supposed, could be only the son of the old people by the fire-side. He was middle aged, nearer forty-five than forty, rough handed and awkward, as if pulling a rope was more natural to him than cleaning a plate; yet he set rather briskly to work in a little room inside the kitchen, making preparations for my supper, which I begged him to busy himself about immediately.

The clatter of the crockery, which was thus called into requisition, aroused the old woman from her slumber, and she stared with an apparent

mixture of astonishment and pleasure to see a guest about to sup in her house. She bounced up and bustled about, making me a thousand civil speeches and apologies for having been caught napping; and her pleasure seemed increased tenfold, when, in a whispered communication from the man, she learned that I had actually engaged my lodgings for the night. Then began in downright earnest the busy stir of preparation. Frying-pans, warming-pans, plates, dishes, sheets and bolsters, severally and collectively engaged the attention of my hostess. It was not easy to guess in what order she classified her ideas, or whether eating or sleeping, the supper-table or the bed-chamber, claimed precedence. In the midst of the din, which need not have been greater had a dozen guests unexpectedly arrived, the antiquated master of the house unconsciously occupied his corner; but a short, thickset woman, formed pretty nearly on the same model as her mistress, and on whose plump cheeks the feet of time had

begun to leave slight traces, came into the kitchen, winking and rubbing her eyes, and adjusting her cap and kerchief, as if she, like the others, had been roused from a snatched and comfortless repose.

As she entered, and encountered the bustling landlady, and her own busy husband, for such the man turned out to be, she stared as if she saw the wonders of a dream; and her astonishment was most audibly expressed, when she learned in her turn that I had ordered supper for *two* and a bed for *one*. Not to be behind hand in this moment of employment, she seized a pair of bellows, and began puffing at the several stems of young trees, which lay at almost their full and natural length across the huge hearth. Now, I dare say not one of my readers has failed to remark, what I have so often observed, the contagious inclination, which seems common to all mankind on such occasions, to seize the bellows out of the hands of one another, and aid in making or marring the fire. Whence comes

this puffing propensity, or why it should be contagious I do not stop to inquire; but for my own part I was quite sure, when this woman took hold of the bellows, that they would not be suffered to remain long in her hands. And scarcely had she applied them to the fire, when her husband threw a longing glance at her occupation, and almost immediately abandoning his own, he flung his handful of knives, forks, and spoons upon the table, and gently snatched the asthmatic implement from the grasp of his helpmate.

"Come, come, my dear," cried he, "let me save you that trouble. Do you give the gentleman's dog his supper, and I'll soon make a blazing fire." And he puffed away accordingly.

She reluctantly resigned; but scarcely had he commenced his operations, when his mistress turned sharply round from the large press, filled with linen, at which she was occupied, and, following the common attraction, placed herself beside the self-satisfied fire-maker, and briskly

divested him of the wind instrument whose harmonies had brought her to the spot.

"There, there, that will do very well," said the hostess; "do you make ready the table while your wife airs the sheets, and let me settle these cross-grained fagots—I know how to make them burn"—and to work she went, puffing away care from the pipe of the bellows.

But scarcely had she begun, when a shrivelled hand, feebly stretched forth from the chimney-corner, felt gropingly in the direction of the sounds, and a tremulous voice exclaimed,

"Give them to me, give them to me; I have nothing else to do, my love; trust to me for making the dampest log burn brightly."

The old dame, in evident disappointment, but good natured withal, yielded to the desire of her superannuated spouse, and placed in his trembling hands the means of producing the popular air he sighed for. "Verily," soliloquized I, "the love of bellows-blowing *must* be an instinct —for what else could reconcile its followers to

the furnace heat of a forge, the monotony of an organ loft, or the perusal of a lottery advertisement? Puff, puff, puff! seems a vital impulse of existence, and comes naturally to almost every man, whether he be or be not trumpeter, poet, or pastry cook!" and I ended my monologue, by mechanically withdrawing the universal instrument from the unconscious hold of my old neighbour, and I forthwith began to prove myself no exception to the rule I had lain down, as applying to mankind in general.

By the time I had succeeded in producing a conflagration among the fagots, which had so long lain fuming and spluttering before me, Ranger had, under the auspices of the younger woman, made an excellent repast, and mine was quite ready for consumption. The glare from the hearth, threw a deep red tinge on all around. Although the old man was evidently fire-proof, his cheeks were scorched into bloom. The hostess looked ruddier than ever, and her assistants were glowing from their efforts at cookery.

All the insect ornaments of the kitchen were

warmed into life by the inspiring flame, and various domestic implements of brass and copper seemed to dance in their dusky corners, while the blaze fell flickering on them, and caused momentary intervals of light and shade. An old upright clock, of English form and prodigious stature, was brought into full relief. Its pendulum waved pompously backwards and forwards, made evident through the oblong oval of a glass window; and the dim dial-plate was surmounted by a broad white sun, whose ghastly disk looked more like a death's-head grinning down into the room. The walnut-tree furniture was old but well preserved. There was an air of serious regularity altogether about the place that looked unnatural at an inn, and was therefore unpleasing; and the total absence of every thing, young or sportive—for there was not as much as a kitten by the chimney side, or a parrot above it—completed the comfortless want of the associations that seem naturally allied with a house of *entertainment.*

Notwithstanding the good fire, I felt chilly, and in spite of the good cheer, unrefreshed. I had the little table brought from the parlour into the kitchen, and I did my best to be sociable. But my own efforts had no external support. The people around me were dull and drowsy. The place was desolate; Ranger slept, and by the time I had finished my bottle of Bordeaux wine, and my liqueur glass of *Cogniac*, a century old, my eyes and those of the skull-faced sun which ornamented the clock, were the only ones in the room that were not fast closed.

Resolved to break away from the heavy spell which bound me, I roused the waiter from his doze, and requested his wife to prepare my bed-room. She started at the sound, looked incredulous a moment, but, recollecting herself, proceeded to carry up stairs the sheets, warming-pan, etcetera. When she had reached half way up the flight of steps that communicated with the inner room, she turned round, and with a

countenance deadly pale, inquired of her husband, "if he was not coming with her?"

"Poh! poh!" replied he, with the same sort of smile which I had before remarked; "can't you go up alone?"

"*Alone!*" echoed she. "Come, come, my dear, for heaven's sake, I am ready to faint with fright."

"Well, well, here I am, my girl," said he, reassuringly, and he accompanied her up stairs, with a bundle of wood under his arm.

I should mention here that, while supper was in preparation, a good deal of conversation was kept up between mistress, maid, and man, which, from the rattling of keys, and the frequent mention of "the green chamber," I concluded, and, as it turned out correctly, to have reference to the room which I was to occupy.

After a little time, feeling quite overcome, I prepared to follow the servants; and though I moved as lightly as possible, with only Ranger's

silken footsteps at my heel, I awoke the old landlady, who stared wide at me once more, on perceiving the route I was taking. "Good night, Sir, God bless you!" said she, with an emphasis that would have suited a farewell to a man setting out on a perilous voyage; and she added, in a more housewife-like key, addressing her servants or her *children*—I did not then know which, for the epithet was not decisive—"Come, my children, light the gentleman to his room—to the green chamber, mind. Good night, Sir; God bless you, and watch over you!"

"Amen!" uttered the feeble voice of the octogenaire by the fire-side; and, as well as I can recollect at this distance of time, I felt an involuntary thrill, as if the faint tone went piercingly and supernaturally through me. But I am rarely subject to such fancies, and they made no impression then.

Lighted up stairs, and conducted by man and *maid*—as we must, by courtesy, call the younger dame—(the hostess having shudder-

ingly replied to my half-joking invitation that she would escort me, " *Me*, Monsieur? no, no, not for worlds!") —I approached the green chamber, so drowsy and fatigued that I paid but little attention to the ambiguous bearing of the party.

CHAPTER II.

Nothing in the whole history of hostelry could be more comfortless than was the chamber to which I was conducted. It was large and ill furnished; its wainscoted sides assorted dismally with the dark and vapoury atmosphere of the whole. The candle seemed struggling in mist, and a more solid fog was rising from the bundle of wet fagots to which my attendants were by turns applying the pipe of an unwieldy and broken-winded bellows. The bed-curtains were of green stuff, of old texture and form, and but for their colour, I should not have divined how the chamber came to be christened *green*; for it and its contents were, with this sole ex-

ception, of a dingy disagreeable hue. The room possessed the affluence of closets, shelves, and presses common to French houses; and, what with the pannels of the wainscot, it looked all doors. There was, however, one window, before which hung a brown curtain; and under a long looking-glass, which reflected the taper from a thick coat of mist, stood a little bow-legged marble table, with rusty gilding and distorted shape, marking it as the revolutionary spoil of some aristocratical and ancient mansion. On this table stood a brown basin and water-jug, of coarse manufacture and uncouth shape; and on the floor, not exactly in the middle of the room, though meant for it, a piece of faded tapestry did the honours of a carpet, of which (like most proxies) it was a sorry representative. Searching for some object of amusement in my dreary apartment, I was conning the dubious subject represented on this patched and piebald shred of antiquity, and tracing the gigantic proportions of a man, clad in a tunic, which

peeped from under a many coloured garment, and bearing a crown upon his head. I took him for one of the monarchs of heraldry, till I discovered that he bore a long blue bludgeon on his shoulder. No, thinks I, he must be the king of clubs; and I was the more confirmed in this opinion, by observing that either the artist was a bungler, or the figure club-footed; when round the red stocking of a leg, which might from its position be either the right one or the left, I traced a yellow band, and distinguished these fragments of words—NI SOYT QUI MA. A protuberance on the shin-bone of this identical member seemed to me a patch, formed of part of the roof of a house, but comparing it with the deformity of the rest of the figure, I exclaimed, quite self-satisfied—"It is Richard the Third—crookbacked—bandy Richard!" But unfortunately for my antiquarianism, I at the moment discovered the name, title, and quality of this doubtful and most dignified personage, all made evident in one word worked

between his legs—or his *pillars*, I might call them—and this word was Hercule.

I never assumed for my dog Ranger a character of downright philosophy—but I certainly was surprised to see him studying this curious representation of "the human form *divine*," quite as attentively as I did myself, and more so when I discovered directly between the feet of this Hercules, a lank, white, sharp nosed, cock-tailed thing, meant no doubt for a *dog*. "Here is a new proof," thought I, "of Ranger's intelligence," while he looked wistfully at the worsted-worked animal, wagged his tail, and scraped upon the tapestry;—but I was a little disappointed I confess, as he unceremoniously doubled himself up and lay down, proving that he was only recognizing a bed, instead of tracing an analogy. I took the hint, however; dismissed my attendants, cut short their civilities, and was soon stretched within the canopy of green curtains.

The beds in France are all excellent; I know

of no exceptions. Woollen mattresses are quite soft enough, without the suffocating and lumpy inequalities of a feather bed; and sufficiently firm, without the crisp and prickly annoyances of a hair-stuffed couch. I should, therefore, I am sure, have slept well through the night in question, had it not been impossible to get a pillow, a very common want in French inns, and I found a tight-covered log-like bolster as complete a murderer of sleep as "Macbeth," or a guilty conscience. I closed my eyes, but to open them again; tossed and turned from side to side; shook the blankets, and beat the hard-hearted bolster; but all ended in broken slumbers, and a crick in my neck.

If the French had not notoriously a horror of fresh air, one might suppose, from the construction of their houses, that they held it in great honour, for the most hospitable facilities are afforded to give it the *entrée* at all parts. It whistled carelessly through a dozen apertures in "the green chamber;" and, after a short time,

finding the key-holes inconvenient channels of communication, it forced the door by which I entered from the corridor (which, according to my general practice, I had not bolted), and another also that opened upon a back stair-case, leading from the court-yard to the garrets. The creaking of these doors was a dubious lullaby; and I experienced that strange laziness, which sometimes creeps upon us when half asleep, and which prevents the momentary exertion that would remove the obstacle to perfect repose—such as a want of sufficient covering on a cold night, or the closing of a window-shutter or a door, on a windy one, like that in question. Instead of boldly getting out of bed, I only strove to shut out the interruption with the blankets, and in this imperfect security I continued my attempts to sleep. The house was completely quiet; not a whisper from below was to be heard; and at last, in despite of all impediments, I sunk into forgetfulness. I must have slept some time, for on opening my eyes, and turning them towards

the fire-place, I saw that the fagots were completely reduced to ashes, which emitted just light enough to shew the floor and the wainscot in the immediate neighbourhood of the chimney. I cannot say what awoke me. I supposed at the moment it was merely the uncomfortable position of my head, but I am not *now* quite sure of that. Be that as it may, and imperfectly awake as I was, I distinguished a short breathing, and observed a figure standing near the fire-place imperfectly shadowed out by the light of the expiring embers. Putting my hand quietly out of bed, I placed it on my gun, which stood close by, and I saw the figure deliberately open a small cupboard, which almost touched the chimney. It closed it soon again; and as neither the opening or shutting made the least noise, I concluded the hinges to have been more carefully oiled than those of larger dimensions, the creaking of which had been all night annoying me.

Being a little impatient, or perhaps I may

say nervous, at this silent visitation, I was just going to invoke the intruder in no set phrase, when a dying gleam from the chimney shewed him to be very distinctly, as I thought, the spare emaciated form of the poor old man whom I had left so snugly by the fire-side in the kitchen. I did not see his face sufficiently to justify me in swearing to his identity; but at the time I had no notion but that it was he; and supposing that he was harmlessly wandering about the house, as old people are so wont to do in their accustomed localities, I let go my gun, turned on the other side, and strove to sleep again. In a moment or two I started up on feeling something gently touching my feet, and putting out my hand, I found it was Ranger, who was creeping up on the bed, and trembling violently, from the cold of his former couch, as I *then* supposed.

I looked sharply through the opening of the curtains, but could see nothing; I listened, but caught no sound; so, concluding that the old gentleman had quietly made his exit, the way by

which he came, I patted Ranger's back, lay down again, and finished my imperfect sleep, from which I again opened my unrefreshed lids, just as the first grey gleam of morn was coming through the window, unobstructed by a shutter, and stealing faintly into the chamber through the moth-eaten woollen curtain

I sprang out of bed, glad to find that *my* hour of rest was come, for my night had harassed me sadly; and I went to the window to ascertain the state of the weather. Upon drawing the window-curtain I saw with some surprise that both doors of the room were closed, and I wondered for an instant how my nocturnal visitor could have so nicely acquired the secret of shutting them without noise. Looking through the window, which opened upon the back premises of the house, I could distinguish nothing in the misty air but a straggling mass of offices, ill-built and ruinous; and I was turning round towards my bed again, when something moving across the yard fixed my attention, and I clearly

perceived the same figure which had entered my room during the night, slowly bend its steps towards the most distant part of the outhouse, that seemed, as well as I could trace its appearance, a kind of barn or granary. "What a perturbed old animal!" thought I; "it is more like a ghost than a man."

This thought had scarce had mental utterance when the figure, having reached the barn, stopped suddenly, turned round its head towards me as I thought and disappeared instantaneously. My eyes vainly strained after it through the haze. I breathed upon and wiped the dust covered pane, but to no purpose; and briefly wondering what the superannuated wanderer could be about, I lay down again in my bed, impatient of a rational hour for rising.

The light came creepingly across the floor and wall, and at length it filled the room. Tired of lying sleeplessly and unoccupied in bed, a situation which some people like, but which is to me always irksome, I definitively arose at about

eight o'clock, and as no one seemed stirring in the house, I wrapped my flannel dressing-gown about me and walked down stairs in search of warm water and breakfast. When I got into the kitchen all was dark, beyond the immediate neighbourhood of the door by which I entered. I heard a quartetto of snoring, in different tones, but I could see nothing. Groping my way forward, I came in direct contact with a table, from which my hand swept off a bottle which came to the floor and broke in pieces. At the sound, and catching a glimpse of my scarce visible figure, three of the sleepers started up—the man with a convulsive oath, the women with shrieks. The latter hid their faces, as I quickly perceived, when the man, more rational, flew to the window and threw wide the shutters, and when he found it was I that had alarmed them he burst into a loud laugh. His wife and mistress, (no insinuation against his morality) echoed his laugh faintly, but pleasedly—and I confess I started, I knew not exactly with what

feeling, when I observed the old man, fast asleep, and occupying precisely the station in which I had left him dozing the preceding night!

The busy stir of the others soon, however, called off my observation from this strange, and, I then began to think, somewhat mysterious being. The volubility of the women was excessive, while inquiring how I slept—whether any thing disturbed me—if I heard any noises—saw any thing unusual, and a variety of other questions, all uniting to convince me that some suspicious belief existed in connection with the room I slept in, and towards which, I must confess, my own notions at the moment had a tendency. I was, however, extremely guarded in my replies, not willing unnecessarily to disturb the fancies of these good people, or to give the sanction of my concurrence to the bad name which they honestly acknowledged their house had acquired. They were very anxious that I should sign a certificate, legalized before a

justice of the peace and public notary, that I had not been disturbed by supernatural sounds or sights, and that I went to their house, a mere stranger, unprejudiced by and unacquainted with the reports of its being haunted. This certificate I did actually give; but while it was in preparation I dispatched my breakfast, and quitted the mysterious mansion to take a turn upon the beach and in the town, secretly resolving to make some inquiry relative to the inn and its inhabitant.

When I found myself fairly out upon the quay, under the influence of a fine sharp morning, I witnessed an admirable illustration of the difference between darkness and day-light. The town, which the night before, had appeared dismal and desolate, now wore the brisk appearance of vivacity and pleasure. It was Sunday morning. Well dressed groups were in motion in the streets; and varied sounds of animation were afloat. At one corner a baker stood at his shop-door, with apron, open shirt, and

naked legs and arms, blowing a long tin horn, which loudly summoned the customers of his oven. The church bell was tolling for prayers. The drums and trumpets of the garrison were sounding for parade; and a noisy party of mountebanks were fitting up a temporary stage in the chief square, and by various dissonant announcements proclaiming the coming entertainments.

I was quite surprised to find the town so well built, so cheerful and so cleanly. Many excellent houses with porticos and arcades, gave promise of wealth and comfort within; and shewed by the style of building, that when they were erected, the rich merchants had profited largely by the discovery of Guinea, the merit and gain of which belong to La Rochelle.

Having by experience acquired the tact so necessary for him who would gain information, I soon led my inquiries to bear upon the quarter which gave me accommodation the preceding night. I did not scruple to put in requisition

the communicativeness of more than one straggling and garrulous citizen, in whose listless and idle air, I read want of mind and wealth of words.

By the time I got back to the inn, I was much better acquainted with its inhabitants than they were aware of; and by a well managed display of my knowledge, I succeeded in getting them to add to it to the full extent of my wishes. So that by a couple of days spent in braving the discomforts of the green-chamber, where I met with no further molestation, and conciliating the good will of my *entertainers*, I gathered sufficient of the raw material of narrative to enable me to manufacture the following story.

CHAPTER III.

It was just fifteen years previous to my visit to La Rochelle, that a catastrophe of a very fatal kind finished a career of great prosperity, long enjoyed by the inn in question, blasted its reputation for fair play, and procured it the suspicion of dark doings and supernatural visitations.

For full twenty years before that gloomy event this house had been in possession of a man named Louis Potdevin, who with his wife, for they had no children, were generally considered to have amassed a very large sum of money, for persons of their calling. But their gains were made without reproach, and seemed the natural consequences of sobriety, industry and

honest dealing. From the moment of Potdevin's entering upon matrimony and business, which were simultaneous speculations, not a proof could be made evident that he had ever swerved from the direct line of honesty. Yet somehow he was always looked on with a suspicious eye. He was a great speculator, and deep intriguer. He was successful in his trade, and discreet in his politics—and though always dabbling in whatever scheme was afloat in the town, of commerce or politics, he always contrived to come clear through, without loss on the one hand, or conviction on the other. He had run safe and sound the gauntlet of the revolution—unharmed in purse or person; had been always one of the most forward of the citizens in every public concern, was always discontented and grumbling with every changing form of government; yet, neither the envy of his townsmen, nor the lynx-eyed scrutiny of the police, could fix a flaw upon his transactions, or find a pretext for impeachment.

In the very first years of the present century, soon after Napoleon made himself Emperor, all the turbulent spirits of France thought the occasion a good one to put their discontent into action. Plots and conspiracies were formed, and insurrections planned in weak abundance, and agents and emissaries were at work in various parts of the country. Amongst the deadly and diabolical designs against the person of Napoleon, "The infernal machine" was the most infamous in plan, and the nearest to being effective in execution. Just at this period, Potdevin was observed to be particularly busy. Not in attending to his bar or cellar—for these just then were chiefly left to the care of his buxom and industrious wife, and a very comely and clever girl, call Marguerite, who was at that time about twenty-five years old, half of which had been passed in her present and only service. She had acquired a great hold on the regard of both her master and mistress, so much so, that they seemed to consider her quite as

their own child, and it was generally believed, from some hints thrown out by the cautious Potdevin, and more loudly echoed by his wife, that Marguerite was destined for the final possession of the fortune, in the earning of which she was so effectually aiding.

Just previous to this eventful period, Potdevin's affairs had seemed to acquire the perfect consistency of success and wealth. He had completed the purchase of his house and premises in the town, and of the amphibious and more hazardous species of property contained in sundry fishing boats and smuggling vessels. Every thing in the house took a new appearance. All was put in repair; painting, papering, and all the etceteras of ornament were expensively resorted to, many pieces of solid furniture, picked up at sales, were added to the existing stock; and plate and linen were profusely laid in. The cellar, too, was well supplied with wines and brandies, of good growths and prime vintages, and Potdevin's house seemed fairly established

as one of the most steady and best in the town. The master piqued himself upon his odd ways. He never made much fuss about the good cheer and superior accommodations of his house, and his humour may be understood by one eccentric whim. He would permit no sign to hang in front of his house, as is general to places which thrive as much by attracting as by paying attention; but in lieu of this common appendage, swung a board, on which was painted,

MOI JE DIS QU'AU BON VIN
IL NE FAUT PAS D'ENSEIGNE.

L. P.

That is to say,

GOOD WINE
NEEDS NO SIGN,

or no *bush*, as our unpoetical proverb has it. Just over the kitchen fire-place, another quaint device was painted,

ON MANGE ICI AUJOURD'HUI POUR DE L'ARGENT,
DEMAIN POUR RIEN,

or, as we say, "Pay to-day, trust to-morrow," a more pithy way of expressing the ambiguous sentiment, which only wanted a date affixed to make it binding.

But all the practical pleasantries of Louis Potdevin were coming to an end. He suddenly, as I before stated, gave up "all customs of exercise," and seemed over head and ears immersed in the troubled waters of politics. But he never communicated any of his secret employments even to his wife or Marguerite. He often went out of the house, returned again privately, and was, for hours together, shut up in the green chamber (which he had totally appropriated to himself), when the customers were all gone away, and his wife and her assistant either in bed, or laudably listening at the key-hole of his door, in vain hopes of embodying into some solid information, the faint whispering which they continually heard between at least two persons.

Matters were going on for some time in this

mysterious way, when on the morning of the 23d of November 1805, Louis Potdevin was found dead in his bed. The consternation of Madame and Marguerite was duly expressed in shrieks and exclamations, when, after vain efforts to obtain admittance by fair means, they forced open the door, drew back the green curtains, and discovered the corpse. In sudden calamities of this kind the course of events is always pretty nearly the same. Great confusion, alarm, and conjecture; surgical examination, official inquiry, the undertaker, the grave-digger, a funeral—and forgetfulness. This process went on with perfect regularity in the case of poor Potdevin. The neighbours came in crowds to the awful scene; horror and indifference, loquacity and silence, shaking of heads, shrugging of shoulders, groans, and sighs, were all profusely displayed, as the spectators varied in degrees of feeling. The authorities and the doctor settled between them, that the deceased was the victim of apoplexy—a mass was said for his soul—his

body was laid in the ground ;—and the wreck of a merchant ship on the coast, and the execution of a criminal in the market-place, were sufficient within a week to turn the tide of public interest into channels quite wide of that which is the subject of our inquiry.

After a few days of violent grief, Madame Potdevin took her station once more at the bar; and Marguerite began to distribute her attentions and smiles, more faintly and subdued, but not less interesting to the customers than before her master's death. The many friends of the house made it a point to eat and drink most encouragingly for the interest of the widow ; and the spirit-stirring calls for the bar-maid were never more frequent, nor so much so indeed, as in the very first days of mourning.

Our inn was the chief resort of the better class of fishermen, and masters of coasting vessels, smugglers as well as fair traders, besides enjoying the custom of very many of the townsfolk and neighbouring farmers, and a fair proportion

of the less dignified orders of travellers, who rode on horseback, or rumbled along the roads, in one horsed *cabriolets*, *pataches*, *char-à-bancs*, and such dislocating conveyances. It may be well supposed that among such a crowd of visitors many a various view was taken of the exact position of Madame Potdevin's concerns, as well as those of her handmaid Marguerite. It was well known that Madame had, immediately on her husband's death, become possessed of a very considerable sum of money, besides securities and rights in property to a large amount, the entire of which was without reserve her own. She was a hale, healthy woman of about forty-five, an excellent age in the eye of an insurance office, or of any man likely to fall in love with the probable continuance of a good jointure, and by no means an objection to him who would submit to the incumbrance of a staid and steady woman, at the corpulent season, in consideration of the weighty items which her property may throw in to balance the account.

Marguerite, on the other hand, was twenty years younger, only *inclined* to *embonpoint*, active, cheerful, good-looking, and almost sure to be the possessor of all the widow Potdevin's wealth, should the latter remain single, and of a great part of it even should she marry and not have children; and although she promised a continuance of rude health, it was not at her age likely that she would ever be "as well as can be expected." These considerations and calculations, pro and con, produced of course considerable fluctuation in the funds of feelings and tempers which composed the motley combinations of character that thronged to the bar, and kitchen, and bed-rooms of our inn Most of the middle-aged bachelors gave a decided preference to the widow, considering that possession is the very kernel, and expectancy but the outer shell of love; and even amongst the younger men, but one or two seemed satisfied to become the heir presumptive of her property in right of her maid. Even these, however, were

rejected by Marguerite, who peremptorily declined their addresses, and handed them over to swell the list of her mistress's suitors.

It was thought singular that Marguerite should thus reject her two public admirers; and the inference was that she had one private lover. It was, however, very hard to find out the truth of this, for she was a close and cautious girl, who held that even tenor of conduct to all comers which suited her situation so well; and she kept her own counsel with a sagacity that offered an excellent example to all her neighbours.

The most conspicuous among the avowed admirers of Madame Potdevin, were Monsieur Ambroise Belpêche, a gardener, Captain Blouffe, a smuggler, and Paul Ricochet, the master of a fishing vessel, the property in which from masthead to keel, from bowsprit to rudder, had duly devolved to Madame Potdevin as forming part of her late husband's possessions. There were several others whose pretensions quickly faded

away before the more substantial claims of the just named candidates. Belpêche was a grey-headed, rosy gilled old fellow, far beyond sixty, a widower without children, well off in the world, having buried his wife and possessing no other kind of incumbrance. He kept a very tasteful and well assorted nursery ground, with a pleasure-garden attached, at the northern suburb of the town, and there was a spruce and rather priggish air about him, when he came sighing at Madame Potdevin across a huge bunch of ranunculus or stock gilly-flower, that marked him for a man of substance and self-consideration.

Captain Blouffe might have been the gardener's son, for aught I know. He was young enough for it at all events, being not more than forty, a swearing swaggering bully, as in duty bound to be; and he had a leering impudence of eye, and a saucy way of putting his quid of tobacco into his mouth, that seemed to announce his conquest to all the bystanders, when he

drank the widow's health in a glass of her own brandy.

Paul Ricochet was a different sort of person from either of these. He had not the sleek and smooth-faced suavity of the one, nor the cut-and-thrust swagger of the other. But he had a way with him more likely to succeed with the fair and gentle sex. He had a happy mixture of boldness with caution—he knew when to keep aloof, and when to go all lengths—when to coax, and when to command—and, above all the best qualifications for a lover, gentle or simple, rich or poor, he had the knack of never betraying by word or look the secret which should be kept safe, from all but the one to whom it should be no secret. He was in other respects a candid off-hand fellow; but on this one point, of deep impenetrable cunning—and he cherished that most laudable hypocrisy which in such cases is worth all the cardinal virtues combined.

The character borne by Paul for profound discretion made him an amazing favourite among

his circle of female friends; and it was long evident that our widow, even before she became one, had looked on him with a most affectionate eye. It was therefore considered pretty certain that when the election of a new husband came to be decided, Paul Ricochet would be found to stand at the head of the poll.

The canvas in the mean time went merrily on, on the parts of the gardener and the smuggler. They lost no opportunity of paying their court, in what they respectively thought the best way. Belpêche gave presents, Blouffe paid compliments—one sighed forth his passion, the other swore to it. The old man touched the widow's avarice, the younger one flattered her vanity—and these are no doubt the two points with all women of her age, between the attractions of which a suitor may long hang suspended, like the coffin of the prophet. Ricochet, meantime, stood quietly on his course, and, like a skilful angler as he was, he baited his hooks with just such food as he knew most likely to

tickle the old woman's fancy and secure her to his purposes. Yet he was too knowing to commit himself with her. He never made a downright declaration; but contented himself with delicate attentions, and general assurances that she had it in her power to make him the happiest of fishermen, &c. All this produced its due effect. The uncertainty of the widow as to his positive designs kept her anxiety alive and did not deaden her regard; while the gardener's sneaking confessions, and the boisterous avowals of the smuggler, tired her of their attachment, before the first could ripen, or the latter be run into harbour, as it might by analogy be imagined.

But in the midst of all these courtships and counter courtships, the widow, so far from thriving on them, was observed by every body to be in a state of continual depression, to wear a feverish look of anxiety, and to shew a nervous shrinking from every mention of the circumstances of her husband's death or even of his

name. This for some days excited but little marvel, as she was known to be a shrewd woman, who understood what the world expected from her, under the circumstances. But when, at the end of a fortnight, so far from the appearance of her suffering wearing off, it was evident that all its symptoms were increased, and that Marguerite as well as her mistress wasted away, looked pale, haggard, and woe-begone, the neighbours began to cogitate on the possible causes of all this; and the customers of the inn assembled there almost as much for gossip at the landlady's expense as for refreshment to her profit.

It certainly seemed very unreasonable for any woman in her circumstances to grow pale and thin, to pass sleepless nights, as she avowed, and lose her appetite as she could not conceal. All the married men agreed that not one of *their* wives would shew such obstinate symptoms for a whole fortnight of widowhood; and a few of the bachelors, who had been repulsed by Ma-

dame Potdevin and Marguerite, put their heads together, to account, if possible, for such an extraordinary combination of events.

One Sunday evening, which was in the early part of the third week after the publican's death, a knot of the aforesaid discarded suitors had assembled round a table in a distant corner of the kitchen; and while apparently discussing the merits of a bottle of *vin ordinaire*, and watching the progress of a game of dominos which two of the party were playing, they gave all their observation to the bar, within which was seated the widow of the woeful countenance, while Marguerite was, with a fatigued and indifferent air, serving the various customers around. The smuggler leaned with his back against the bar counter, his arms crossed, and a cigar in his mouth, puffing a cloud of smoke, which, intermixed with sighs, was intended no doubt as symbolical of incense for the widow's shrine. Belpêche was sitting on a chair inside, his cocked hat perched upon his neatly pow-

dered curls, his pig-tail sticking sprucely out behind, the lapel of his green coat decorated with a large bunch of myrtle, his white waist-coat and lace frill all in order, and his black satin breeches, with their shining paste buckles, were contrasted with the broad blue ribbed stockings, meant probably to magnify the proportions of his spindle shanks. Paul Ricochet sat silently on a bench near the fire, but quite within the pale of the widow's jurisdiction, in his blue jacket and trowsers, his red woollen cap, and huge boots gaping in large wrinkles far up his thighs.

"Well, it's an odd thing to me," said a master tailor, one of the junta of observers before-mentioned, "how that woman can listen to the addresses of that old cabbage planter, and that goose of a smuggler, only a fortnight after her poor husband has been buried."

"Because she rejected *your* addresses a week ago, isn't it?" retorted a surly old grocer who sat in the corner. "Poor woman," continued

he, "she does *not* listen to their addresses—she's plainly thinking of other matters."

"Aye, that's clear," murmured a tinman, who lived next door to the inn, and who had vainly endeavoured to hammer himself into the widow's favour, singing amorous ditties as an accompaniment the whole day long, ever since her husband's death. "That's clear enough, and a troubled conscience she must have, to pine away as she does in spite of every thing done to please her."

"Yes, yes," cried a chorus of the whole party, "there must be something on her conscience."

"Her conscience!" said the grocer, who seemed resolved to be the champion of the widow, "what do you mean?"

"Why, I mean much more than I choose to say," replied the tinman; "but this I will say, that Potdevin's death was a sudden and a strange one; and I might say more if I chose it."

This was, however, *enough*. Ill nature and

scandal are not exigent of arguments. They are always ready to take a hint, and require nothing half so strong as "holy writ" to form a foundation for the structures they raise. In three days from the evening in question, reports and murmurs went abroad; and in two or three more, opinions were freely given that poor Potdevin had come to his death unfairly, and that his wife and her maid had perpetrated the murder: whether with or without associates, the public mind was not quite made up.

Madame Potdevin and Marguerite, the accused, were, as is usual, the last persons to hear the accusation. They were arraigned, found guilty, and condemned, to the perfect satisfaction of their neighbours, long before the pestilent breath of calumny had warned them that they were its victims. But the public had on this occasion fair grounds for *suspicion* certainly. There was something mysterious in the whole tenor of Potdevin's conduct just before his death. He had secrets beyond doubt, and com-

panions joined in them, be those companions whom they might; and from mysterious combinations, dark results must be expected. His death was sudden; and from the hurried way in which posthumous inquests are slurred over in France, it was not impossible in a case of this kind that "strangulation" should have stood in the place of "apoplexy," in the magistrate's report. And in addition to the widow's and Marguerite's deep suffering, so charitably construed into direct evidence of guilt, the neighbouring tinman before-mentioned, gave decided intimation of his belief that the inn was haunted by the ghost of its murdered master. He had come to this conclusion from the fact of his having heard, by a close application of his ear to the adjoining wall, sundry unaccountable night noises, proceeding, of course, from the troubled spirit, independent of the sighs and groans of the repentant woman, who suffered under its visitations.

CHAPTER IV.

EVERY trivial circumstance gives weight to calumny, and several concurrent facts were at this time remarked. Both the women were seen to go much more frequently to church than they had ever been accustomed to; and the widow particularly was observed to give large sums in charity, to attend repeatedly at the confessional; while a succession of masses were subscribed to and regularly performed, nominally for the repose of her husband's soul; but it was shrewdly suspected, more with a view to the pardon of her own.

General inferences only could be drawn from these facts. More particular proofs were called

for. A strict scrutiny on the inn and its inmates was the consequence; and a few nights more brought to light the circumstance of a man, muffled in a cloak, coming secretly to the suspected house a little before midnight, after the customers had all retired. He was cautiously admitted by Marguerite, and a careful observance of the windows by the party without shewed them that the green chamber, that in which poor Potdevin breathed his last, was lighted up, a most uncommon circumstance; and a hundred strange conclusions were formed upon this mysterious event. But matters went on just as before, nothing positive taking place to criminate the suspected women but their *looks*, that false evidence on which many an unjust judgment is pronounced.

Now, to put my readers out of pain, or at least to place the characters of two innocent women out of jeopardy, I must say at once that they had positively nothing to do with the assumed murder, directly or indirectly. But it is

very certain that they did suffer dreadfully; almost ever since they discovered the blackened face of the corpse staring behind the green bed curtains, by all those appalling noises, which waken echo at midnight, harrowing the consciences of the criminal, and thrilling through the hearts of even the guiltless.

The very night of the day on which the publican was laid in his grave, when the solitude of death itself seemed on the house, the widow, lying sadly in her bed (while Marguerite slumbered disturbedly in the same room), distinctly heard low sighs and groans, proceeding from the green chamber, which was at the opposite side of the corridor, on which her bed-room opened. Not being of any remarkable weakness of mind, but perhaps the contrary, she endeavoured to persuade herself that it was but her fancy that was at work. She had her share of superstition, however, and she piously repeated her prayers to the Virgin, and her own especial saint, without disturbing her tired and sleepy attendant.

That night passed over; but the next brought a repetition of the awful sounds. Terrified now in downright earnest, and anxious to have her apprehensions confirmed or put to rest, she called in a half whisper to Marguerite, who occupied a bed beside her's.

"Marguerite, Marguerite! are you awake?"

"I am afraid I am, Madame."

"Do you hear any thing?"

"I hope not."

"But what do you think?"

"Oh, Madame, I am too frightened to think!"

"Christ preserve us!"

"And the Virgin!"

"And Saint Fredegonde!"

"Amen!"

And a loud and voluble repetition of the due number of *Paters* and *Aves* succeeded in silencing the indistinct causes of alarm. A third night's repetition of these awful warnings was alone wanting to confirm the belief of Madame Potdevin that her husband's spirit was not yet

at rest. The third night came, and with it the so much dreaded sounds. And from that night, might be fairly traced the perceptible misery of appearance, the extravagant donations, the supererogatory masses, and all the other symptoms which drew down the observation of the world.

Madame Potdevin being, as was before stated, a knowing, clever sort of woman, began to open an account of regular calculation between her fears and her profits; and Marguerite, from a perfect sympathy of interest, entered fully into her mistress's views. They were both actually dying by inches of affright and suffering; yet they most enduringly bore up against it all, sooner than, by making known the fact of the house being haunted, utterly ruin its reputation, and cause it to be wholly deserted, the certain consequence as they justly foresaw. It has been seen that the tavern and coffee-house department of the establishment, found no abatement of custom. The eating and drinking went on as

merrily, or more so than ever. But no traveller had as yet occupied a bed, since the recent awful catastrophe. Although the mistress and maid, whom we may almost consider as joint hostesses, suffered terrors indescribable in the endurance of their nightly torment, they rather discouraged for awhile any persons from sleeping at the inn, lest the fatal secret might be prematurely betrayed, for they trusted to the means they employed for getting rid of the evil completely. But when night after night, and week after week, in spite of prayers, and masses, and confessions, the same frightful noises disturbed them, they resolved to make one confident to the sad secret, and they honestly told the Curé of their parish the cause of their distress. Having thus unbosomed themselves, they had half got rid of their fears, and they were almost disposed to join in opinion with the incredulous priest, when he laughed at their recital, and told them they were a pair of fools. He, however, agreed to their request

that he should watch one night in the haunted room, and use all the means which religion could afford to quiet the perturbed spirit. He accordingly came secretly (as he thought) to the inn, but we have seen that he was watched; and his proceedings having gone regularly on without harm or hindrance, he left the house as he came to it, confirmed in the belief that the women were the dupes of some delusion or some trick.

Madame Potdevin and Marguerite strove to persuade themselves that they thought with him, but the next night brought back the sounds of alarm, and the renewal of their terrors. They were then convinced that there was no *delusion*—but they did begin to imagine that there might be some *trick*. Somewhat quieted by this notion, they set themselves to a regular task of observation, and they soon noticed a continued train of circumstances, which led to the belief that they had been dupes of a very impure mortality, instead of those ghostly visitations they

had imagined. They now remarked that every morning some article of food, left unlocked up on the preceding night, disappeared with wondrous regularity. Bread, cheese, and other viands, whether fish or flesh, were sure to be carried in small quantities away. Cats and rats were in their turn suspected of these paltry depredations; but a little reflection caused their acquittal of the charge, for it was impossible that they could produce the terrifying sounds which were the accompaniments to such performances. Then again, it appeared unlikely that such ignoble pilfering could be the sole object of those successive attempts. The property of the house was untouched. Spoons, and forks, and every other portable object of value, were carefully counted and found safe. Could all this be then the persevering malice of some enemy, or the wantonness of some thoughtless friend, merely put in practice to frighten its victims? But by whom *could* it be practised? Who could thus attain free entrance to the house, the doors of

which were so regularly locked? The women inquired of each other and of themselves—and the debate ended in their being unwillingly forced to suspect François, the lame and purblind hostler, of being the author of these pranks, for some object, the truth of which lay in some well too deep for *their* fathoming.

It was, therefore, decided that he should be carefully examined, and keenly questioned; but on the very morning fixed for this inquisition, François made his appearance before his mistress and Marguerite, and very bluntly told them that, sorry as he was for it, he was forced to quit the service in which he was beginning to grow grey. Startled at this announcement, and wondering how he could have divined their suspicions, and even more than anticipated their intentions, the women eyed him keenly—but discovered nothing at all like guilt. Madame asked him, with feigned indifference, what could have caused so sudden and unprovoked a resolution on his part.

"Because," replied he, "I am worn and wasted to death—and you yourselves the same;—because my poor master was murdered, and the house is haunted by his ghost!"

The abrupt and savage tone of this reply made the women start and shudder. François seemed to remark those symptoms with a suspicious air; and he cut short all further interlocution by a brief statement that from the time of his master's death he had been incessantly tormented by night noises in the outhouse where he slept, or attempted to sleep; that the few horses which had been under his care shewed evident proofs of the fear and uneasiness which all dumb animals display at the times when spirits are abroad; and, finally, he demanded in a decisive tone the arrears of his wages, and a certificate of his faithful services. Madame Potdevin terrified by the dread of the effect which this sudden measure might produce on the public mind, to the certain detriment of her business, and the probable injury of her character, used

the most cogent arguments which her knowledge of human nature, and that of François, suggested, to change the hostler's resolution. But all was unavailing, although seconded bravely by the eloquent energy of Marguerite. François insisted on his point being conceded, and he carried it of course. The last request of his late mistress, on his quitting the house, was that he would keep profoundly secret the circumstances which caused his removal—and François did not fail to treasure up the recollection of this anxiety for concealment, which he could attribute to but one cause. The fact was, that this poor fellow had been himself, several years before, severely smitten by the striking charms of Mademoiselle Marguerite, but his passion being quite ridiculous in her eyes, it had met with no return but contempt. This produced that natural retort of feeling, dislike on his part; and he came readily into the opinion of the neighbouring tinman as to the mysterious noises which were so frequently heard by both. The separation of François

from the old firm of which he had so long been an humble partner, condensed the vapoury mass of conjecture which had been so long afloat, and it took the shape of a lowering cloud of obloquy on the objects over whom it hovered.

In the meantime, poor Madame Potdevin and Marguerite, so far from being in any way relieved from their apprehensions, had them redoubled by the conviction that the hostler was innocent; and looking at their persecution either as human or supernatural, they had but a duplicate of perplexity and alarm. They, however, resolved to make strenuous efforts to baffle their tormentor should mortal appetite be really a matter of importance to him. They consequently put every remnant of victuals under lock and key; and the night of François' departure, they carefully bolted and barred every entrance to the house, except the private door leading to the green-chamber from the back stairs—but that they durst not approach through the awful premises. That was, how-

ever, pretty clearly the vulnerable point for either ghost or robber, and that very night the noises were renewed. Groans, lamentations, and even, as the affrighted woman thought, murmured maledictions came in hollow tones through the panels and wainscote; and to complete the horror of the haunted hostess, she found on the kitchen table, when she descended the next morning, a paper, on which was traced in characters of *blood* the following words:

"RASH WOMAN!

"Durst thou controul the lawful master of this house and thee? Venture no more to thwart my desires, or dread the vengeance of

THY HUSBAND'S GHOST."

This dreadful warning was the climax of the widow's tortures. The cup of her sufferings was above the brim; she could bear no more; but determined, with the full concurrence of

Marguerite, to make known the state of facts to a few intimate friends, and take decisive measures for the discovery of the horrid case, be it what it might.

CHAPTER IV.

The close-drawn circle of the widow Potdevin's regard included only those who, as she thought, gave her a share of theirs. This was a narrow, but a natural method of regulating her friendships, and was certainly less likely to produce disappointment, than a more profuse expenditure of benevolence would have been. Half-a-dozen persons, at the utmost, composed the select junta in which the widow would consent to repose any confidence. Belpêche, Blouffe, and Ricochet formed half this council; and Marguerite, with a couple of gossipping female neighbours, completed it.

The avowed object of the meeting being, on

the one hand to make an awful disclosure, and on the other to afford advice and assistance in a serious emergency, much gravity and importance was carried in every countenance, and great curiosity in every mind—but one. That one was Paul Ricochet's, who knew very well before hand all that was about to be divulged, and made light, or pretended to do so, of all the widow's and her bar-maid's fears.

The assemblage took place, on the very night of the day when Madame Potdevin discovered the sanguinary threat before copied, in the little inner room, the penetralia of the pot-house, from which the widow could still, in the midst of her disclosure, keep a sharp eye on the customers in the kitchen, and lend a ready ear to their calls. The business of the meeting was opened by a succinct detail in Madame Potdevin's best manner of story-telling, of all the mysterious circumstances preceding her husband's death, and of the still more horrifying combinations which followed that startling event.

With low voice and suppressed utterance she spoke of the nightly visitings, while her auditors, (with one exception), gave a nervous attention, and seemed like the speaker afraid of awakening the echos of the green chamber just over their heads. The few customers had dropped one by one away; the night waned fast; and at length came the grand point of information, cogitation and dread—the terrific denouncement of that very morning—the bloody billet! At sight of this appalling document, a thrill of horror ran through the audience—all but Ricochet. While the countenances of the others betrayed the curdling of their best blood, his only shewed an incredulous curl of lip. The women were horror-struck, Belpêche shook in every point, Blouffe twisted and turned from side to side, coughed and swaggered, and cursed a little; and the whole party bore testimony to the blood-traced characters being almost a fac-simile of the strangled inn-keeper's hand-writing, while even Paul Ricochet acknowledged them to shew a spectral sort of resemblance.

Next came the expression of the various opinions on the case. The women were decidedly of opinion that it was the ghost, and nothing but the ghost, that had written the paper; and they counselled the widow to submit without resistance to the exactions demanded, without any impious efforts at examination of their propriety—to give the best in the house to satisfy the cravings of the spectre—and then to abandon the house itself, and its unearthly occupant for ever.

This unsatisfactory and absurd advice was cut short by Blouffe, who could not restrain his impatience nor his temper. He burst into a whirlwind of passion—abused the women as croaking and cowardly—swore a dozen furious oaths—disclaimed all belief in ghosts and goblins—wiped the perspiration from his forehead—and, observing through the window that the finger of the white faced dial in the kitchen was placed perpendicularly against the nose of the sun, indicating the near approach of midnight (the very hour when the noises had hitherto

commenced), the captain took up his hat and short cloak, and protested against staying longer on such a foolish consultation.

He was, however, in his turn interrupted by Paul Ricochet, who seized him by the arm, and said, with his peculiar and not very satisfactory smile,

"Nay but, Captain, you must not abandon us this way—just at the hour when the ghost is about to visit us?"

The women screamed, as if Paul had uttered a blasphemy; Belpêche exclaimed against the indecorum and indecent levity of the expression, Blouffe swore a huge oath, and prepared to rush out of the room. Paul Ricochet laughed outright, with an air of incredulous gaiety which made the whole party tremble. At the same instant the kitchen clock struck twelve—and the twang of the last stroke had not died away, when a low deep groan was distinctly heard to proceed from the green room above stairs, accompanied by a rumbling sound, such as has been

the sure announcement of an unquiet spirit, time immemorial.

A thrill of horror ran through the assemblage. The women hid their faces; Blouffe shook as if seized by an ague fit; Belpêche alone recovered energy enough to speak.

"This is too bad," said he, addressing Paul, "too bad, Mister Ricochet—this is your doing—you have some accomplice in this vile trick, and some design too deep for me to fathom. I denounce you to this amiable lady, widow Potdevin, and before her friends here assembled, as an impostor, a trickster, a juggler!—you may sneer and laugh if you like it, Sir,"—continued the agitated gardener, looking irefully at the object of his accusation—but there was neither sneer nor laugh on the face of Paul Ricochet. A pallid hue had overspread it, and he appeared either overwhelmed with guilt, or seized with fear. Belpêche did not hesitate in attributing his visible emotion to the first cause, from the very natural delight which he felt at

his own sagacity, having been the stimulant to which it was owing.

"Look at him, Madame Potdevin; look at him, ladies; look at him, Marguerite; look at him, Captain Blouffe!" cried the exhilarated Belpêche. Every eye was turned towards Paul; but before any one had time to fix its scrutinizing glances on him, a groan louder than the first, and a repetition of the rumbling, drew off the attention of all, and filled the party with renewed alarm.

"Yes, yes," cried Belpêche, "it is clear that his accomplice can time these interruptions to save him from condemnation."

"It must be so!" exclaimed Blouffe, with a tremendous oath, recovering his courage and clear-sightedness; "it must be so! Paul Ricochet, this is all your doing!"

"Paul, Paul!" whispered Madame Potdevin, tenderly incredulous, "can it be possible?"

"Can it be possible?" echoed the two female neighbours.

"No, I am sure it can *not*, and that it *is* not," said Marguerite, briskly. "I'll warrant it that Paul knows no more of the trick, if it be one, than Monsieur Belpêche himself; and is no more capable of such a scandalous proceeding than Captain Blouffe is."

"By the ——," blustered Blouffe, about to utter some terrific adjuration.

"I'll tell you ——," stammered Belpêche, beginning some new tirade. But they were stopped short by Paul Ricochet, who stood up with a resolute demeanour, walked quickly to the door of the room, which he locked firmly and put the key in his pocket, and then advancing into the middle of the group, he said,—

"Gentlemen and ladies, all this is going too far. It must have an end, and speedily. I confess myself not surprised at your suspicions, but I hope no one that knows me will calmly believe me guilty of such base conduct, from any interested motive. I was, till now, I acknowledge it, quite incredulous—I laughed at

these alarms. But I am not now disposed to do so. That something is at work, human or supernatural, is clear. I protest myself wholly innocent of all share in these doings; but I am accused, and the truth must come out. Therefore no one, man or woman, quits this room till all are agreed as to some measures for sifting this mystery, and discovering its truth. That I am resolved on."

The utterance of this oration was followed by a very serious debate. The first thing proposed, or rather commanded, by Paul, was an immediate search in the room above. His orders were, after some demurring, obeyed; and, followed by the whole party, armed as best they could supply themselves, with shovels, tongs, and candlesticks, he boldly ascended to the green chamber. The women all stood trembling at the door; Captain Blouffe let his candle fall and be extinguished—by accident of course—and ran down stairs to re-light it, although there were four or five others close by;

and Paul and Belpêche with a tolerable air of courage, went in, and carefully examined every part of the room, not even omitting the fatal bed; but they found nothing. The door was closed and the party descended, Blouffe leading the way, politely lighting the ladies down stairs, and Paul bringing up the rear, with an air of dissatisfied abstraction, either very natural or very well acted.

Once more seated in the little room below, the consultation was renewed with increased energy. Many plans were proposed, many rejected; an avowal of the circumstances, the calling in of the police, and such like public displays, were deliberately voted to be dangerous to the reputation of the house, and likely to defeat every effort for discovery, by putting the ghost on its guard. A quiet but energetic system of watching was resolved on, as best adapted to catch the impostors, if such were at work, and it was finally decided, that the three men present, the rival suitors, the chosen counsellors of Madame Potdevin, were successively

to keep watch, until the mystery was one way or another unravelled.

Lots were drawn by the three to decide the order of precedence, in which their watchings were to take place. Madame Potdevin cut three pieces of coarse brown paper of different lengths, the shortest of which was to entitle the drawer to the enviable preference for the first night's duty in the widow's service; and she firmly closed her hand, as the aspirants stretched out theirs.

Belpêche, half trembling, shut his eyes, drew first—and pulled the shortest. Blouffe tried next, and turned his head aside, unwilling to look his fate in the face. He had taken the second shortest, and as the widow opened her hand, and gave the last and longest lot to Paul Ricochet, a well pleased twinkle played in her eye, at the good luck which removed her favourite the farthest from the dangerous trial.

The ceremony being concluded, each man put on his best coat of valour. Belpêche

avowed himself ready for duty for the next night, Blouffe (hoping that Belpêche's success might save him from the necessity of coming into action at all) swore, that but for thwarting the destiny, which fixed the lots, he would himself undertake the morrow's watch, and settle the business wholly by his own exertions. Ricochet talked very little, and only expressed his wish that all might terminate well for all parties.

And now, to give a proper solemnity to the proceeding, to inspire the adventurous knights with still greater ardour in the enterprize, and to display her own liberality, the widow Potdevin solemnly declared, that feeling her lone and unprotected state, and appreciating the service thus undertaken on her behalf, she had decidedly made up her mind to confer upon the successful assailant of her midnight persecutor, the sum of ten thousand francs in cash, accompanied by whatever other reward it was in her power to give—and that he might decide on asking.

The last words of her declaration were uttered

in a faltering voice, with averted head and downcast eyes, the latter taking a general glance at her own fat and comely person reflected in the looking glass, as if she were conscious of the views of the trio around her, and that *that* alone could be the object of their hopes.

"Oh, generous woman!" sighed forth old Belpêche, fragrantly.

"Bravo, widow!" cried Blouffe, familiarly slapping his hard broad fist upon her shoulder.

"Do you say nothing, Paul?" asked the widow, in a subdued and intermarrying tone.

"Why, Madame," replied he, "you know I am a man of few words, and I quite understand the force of the frank declaration you have made to these gentlemen and myself. I am sure you intend doing what you promise, and I am *very* sure we are all three very happy in the hope it holds out to him who may have the good luck to be entitled to claim it. But ladies, you know, Madame, sometimes change their minds, and may be it would be as well

for all parties if you would put your promise in writing, and get it regularly attested before a notary to-morrow. You will pardon my boldness, I am sure, and not mistake my motives."

"I do pardon you freely, Paul," replied the widow, "and I approve the prudence which has always characterized you. I willingly accede to your proposal, and the paper shall be signed to-morrow."

Bursts of acknowledgment from the gardener and the smuggler, who each hoped himself the winner of the prize, although dreading the risk to be encountered, and a quiet and contented smile from Paul Ricochet, ended the conference. Morning dawned ere the party would venture to separate; the widow's friends stole away unobserved from the house, and she and Marguerite lay down in their beds, to ruminate on the past, and snatch a few hours' repose to enable them to meet the future with renovated strength.

CHAPTER V.

The following day was ushered in with much fidgettiness on the part of Belpêche, and a rather uncomfortable state of feeling to the rest of the combination of ghost catchers. It was not that Belpêche was actually a believer in ghosts, but he was a cautious old fellow, and thought it foolish to trust his own incredulity too far; and, like most people who believe those things, either in whole or in part, he had, perhaps, good reasons for his fears. He therefore made it a rule never to walk through a church-yard at night, nor to speak slightingly of supernatural appearances, nor to put out the candle until he was fairly under the blankets, always pulling

his legs into bed with infinite spirit, lest something more might be lurking under it than met the mortal eye. As it grew dark, therefore, on this important day, he felt any thing but philosophically indifferent, and a compunctious shivering once or twice came over him, at the thought that he was perhaps braving some supernatural power. But his better man at length prevailed over these treacherous misgivings, and he returned to the last night's conviction that the whole affair was a piece of human, or rather inhuman waggery, or if effected from serious motives, that it was a device of Paul Ricochet to frighten the widow into his possession. This last notion roused up the little remnant of Belpêche's courage, and he trudged off towards the scene of adventure, determined to run every risk in order to thwart the unfair play thus put in practice by his rival.

When he arrived at the inn, he found the rest of the allies assembled in the little parlour, quite as punctual as if it had been their own

turn of watch. Blouffe was swaggering up and down the room, and offering wagers of rum, gin, brandy, tobacco, and English muslin (favourite articles of his) that Belpêche would blink the undertaking and leave them in the lurch. Marguerite, who seemed alone to uphold the balance of equity, stood stoutly up for the gallant gardener, and the entrance of the old man proved that he had quite as much blood in him as she gave him credit for.

His arrival was hailed with many cordial acknowledgments of his bravery, and anticipations of his prowess, by the two friendly female neighbours, but none of the others seemed much exhilarated by his punctuality; and the widow, in particular, looked sulky and disappointed, for in fact she had reckoned, when her first fears for Ricochet's safety had somewhat subsided, that the cowardice of his rivals would have kept them from the undertaking, and left him a clear field for the acquirement of the prize she intended for him.

Blouffe was still more displeased. for had the gardener forfeited his pledge of precedence, he meant to have protested against the whole arrangement as null ; but now he had no excuse for not going through his share of the adventure, and therefore he was as dogged and sullen as any poltroon could be.

Paul Ricochet had confidently reckoned on the timidity of the gardener for making him forfeit his engagement. He feared that the cunning of the old man might discover the secret before he could come into action himself. As to Captain Blouffe he had no apprehension of his effecting any thing but a retreat.

Marguerite was influenced by feelings of her own, and altogether the gardener was not very enthusiastically received. That was a pity, for in his then frame of mind he required encouragement, and he felt his drooping spirit thirst for a draught of that moral alcohol which he expected in vain. Baffled in that hope, he con-

tented himself with a glass of cogniac, and Captain Blouffe took another, just for company's sake, and for the liberal purpose of drinking success to his rival. This he did from his heart, for he began to wish the widow at the very devil for having engaged him in the adventure; and he was little less severe on himself for having embarked in it.

The clock told half past eleven. All preparations were made. Belpêche affectionately saluted the four females, wrapped himself in his warm great coat of brown camlet, put on his white cotton nightcap, placed Captain Blouffe's cutlass under his arm, took a well-trimmed lamp in his hand, and with the air of a man about to be turned off a scaffold, he tottered up towards the green chamber, for there it was resolved that he should keep watch, meeting the ghost (or the impostor) as it were upon the very threshold of the premises it had hitherto with impunity invaded. Paul Ricochet propped up the old gardener at one side, and Blouffe promised to do

so on the other; but before he reached the upper landing-place he contrived to let the cork fall out of the bottle of brandy, which he carried for Belpêche's comfort, and while he fumbled about in search of it, quaffing copiously all the time, Belpêche and his less cowardly companion had fairly entered the room.

A fire was soon blazing, Paul having during the day placed the faggots and the more combustible brushwood in the chimney. Belpêche dropped shivering into an arm chair by the fireside, and Paul, delighted at the exhibition of terror before him, placed on the table the leg of a potted goose, some bread and cheese, and a black pudding, as the very best sort of ingredients for exorcising a ghost or exercising a human being. Blouffe peeped sneakingly in, with the half emptied brandy bottle, and soon sneaked out again, as spiritless as the half he had emptied. Ricochet wished the doughty sentinel good night, with an air of exaggerated apprehension; and faithfully promising to come

to his relief, at the least alarm, he retreated quickly down stairs, and took up his station, as agreed upon with Captain Blouffe and the women, in the little parlour.

The nervous anxiety which prevailed below, and the agonizing agitation which reigned above, were soon, not relieved, but replaced, by the visitation so dreaded and so dreadful. One—two—three!—seven—eight—nine!—*twelve!* struck the clock; and "*Twelve!*" in full chorus exclaimed the occupants of the parlour, when one ghostly groan came down through the chinks of the ceiling, followed by a feeble scream from Belpêche's terror-parched throat—and in an instant after, a crash was heard, as if some heavy substance had fallen on the floor above.

The women all screamed, and half of them hid themselves under the table. But the other two, Madame Potdevin and Marguerite, shewed more presence of mind and body. The first threw herself upon Paul Ricochet (who, armed with a long rusty rapier, was valiantly rushing up-

stairs,) and with loud vociferations declared that he should not run the risk of an encounter with the mysterious enemy above. Marguerite flung herself upon Captain Blouffe, not for the purpose of detention, but to push him towards the door, from which he most restively hung back. He had boldly pulled his brass barrelled pistol out of his belt, and cocked it, but he himself shewed nothing of the same readiness to go off.

"Go on, Captain, go on!" cried Marguerite, shoving him forwards with hands and knees.

"Who the devil is holding me there?" exclaimed the captain, plunging backwards, and laying a strong posterior emphasis on every word.

"You shan't, you shan't!" sobbed the widow hugging Paul in her arms.

"For God's sake, let me go! Monsieur Belpêche will be murdered!" roared Paul; and at length, by a bold plunge, he escaped from the widow's embraces, rushed towards the door, and darted up the stairs, lugging Blouffe along with him, by the collar of his coat.

When they reached the door of the green chamber, Ricochet burst it open with his foot, and Blouffe, in his tremor, fired off his pistol close to his companion's head, singeing the fur of his cap, and sending a bullet whizzing through one of the bed-posts. Paul sprang forward, and Blouffe, gaining courage "at the sound himself had made," and ashamed to be passed by the very women, who now came clamouring up the stairs, followed into the room, and assisted Paul in picking up the astounded gardener, who lay on his face on the floor. The table was upset beside him, and every appearance of the preparations for his supper removed.

Paul having satisfied himself that Belpêche was alive and unwounded, except in spirit, handed him over to the cares of Blouffe and the women, and proceeded to search in every possible direction for some traces of the enemy. He examined well, above in the garrets, down in the cellars, and in every other nook and corner of the house; then took a careful survey

of the outer premises, and left no place untried, where necessity, the mother of invention, or fear, the father of devotion, might have forced a man to hide. His search was all in vain, and he returned into the house baffled and dissatisfied.

The gardener's account of the apparition, which had nearly terrified him to death, was most appalling. He could not *describe* it, he said, for he acknowledged that the moment he heard its first groan, as it entered the green chamber, he fell down flat on his face, and never ventured to look up till Paul Ricochet came to his relief. But he was certain that it must have been something very dreadful, to have produced such an astonishing effect;—and he did not venture to doubt its being supernatural, from that very circumstance, and from the strong smell of brimstone left behind it, when it vanished in a flash of lightning, and took its leave with a clap of thunder.

The discharge of Captain Blouffe's brass barrelled pistol, satisfactorily explained the

latter phenomenon to Paul's understanding; and the disappearance of the viands, which none but himself had remarked, convinced him that the player of these pranks was at any rate a very hungry or ill-fed fellow. More could not for the present be ascertained; and the party broke up, agreeing that on the following night, some more decisive precautions were to be taken; and fixing the hour of meeting in the little parlour, at somewhat earlier than before, to allow of a full consultation on the measures to be pursued.

The following night, at between nine and ten o'clock, a man was observed walking to and fro in apparent agitation, on the beach of the outer harbour of the town. He was wrapped in a coarse boat cloak. On his head was a red woollen night-cap. He wore the large wrinkled boots peculiar to seafaring men. He had a lighted cigar constantly in his mouth, except when he took it out for a moment to make way for the neck of a leather-covered brandy-flask.

Yet notwithstanding all this, and although the night was by no means cold for the season, this solitary personage was observed by several passers by to tremble and shake by fits; and to some half dozen friendly "how do you do's?" he only replied by a chattering of the teeth, and a half-choked articulation, which belied the "very well, thank ye," that he meant to utter.

The man was Captain Blouffe, and the cause of his agitation was fear.

I have passed over, without an attempt at describing it, the torturing day he passed, because it was indescribable; and I only glance at his night terrors, because they form a necessary part and portion of the horrors of my story. Blouffe paced up and down the shingly strand, looking westward in vain, for courage from the blustering tide that sent its rampant waves high up the mound. He thought that the ghost of Cardinal Richelieu was abroad, and sporting over this huge monument of his genius. He next turned his eyes despairingly

towards the east, to see what inspiration might be gathered from the moon, just then rising. It was in its third quarter, ghastly to look at and mishapen withal, oblong and awkward, giving the figure of an ill cut cheese, of a dusky pale complexion—and it seemed to flounder (the wrong side uppermost) in a sea of mist and murkiness, like a porpoise rolling over a sandy shoal.

"Worse and worse!" thought Captain Blouffe, "every thing is disheartening and ominous! What is to be done?" His cogitations resolved themselves at length into the affirmative of his wishes, triumphing over the fears which put a strong negative upon every proposition for courageous exertion. But he struck a long and well considered account between the risk and the reward of what he was about to undertake; and after all, it was not wonderful that the comely widow and her heavy pockets, should have weighed down her side of the balance, and made the flimsy and

vapoury spectre finally kick the beam. It was probably the last quaffed mouthful of brandy that produced this effect. Blouffe turned briskly towards the place of rendezvous; but as he put the empty flask into the side pocket of his cloak, he could not help casting a wistful look at his own little cutter, dancing lightly on the bosom of the waves, and he half wished himself once more out at sea, instead of in the harbour of matrimony with the widow Potdevin. He felt, however, too far advanced in the adventure to draw back with any chance of preserving his character; and he walked straight into the little parlour, where the party was really assembled, with as bold an air as he could muster for the occasion.

The arrangements for the night's proceedings were, after some deliberation, finally settled. Blouffe declared point blank that he would not watch in the green chamber, and he defended this resolution plausibly enough, by reasoning on the greater chances of entrapping the invader

by luring him farther into the bowels of the house, and thus letting the burglary be more thoroughly effected. As he was the most prominent actor for that night, he assumed all the importance of his brief authority, and he traced the order of the operations, with as much pompous solemnity as if he had been a corporation magistrate fixing the order of a procession.

The widow, with her handmaid Marguerite and her two faithful friends, were committed to the quiet concealment of her own bed-chamber, with positive directions to all four to hold their tongues as inactive as possible, that by their self-violence in keeping silent for awhile no suspicion might be entertained by the intruder, should he project another attempt on the premises that night. Belpêche (the strong weakness of whose timidity was overcome by the more powerful curiosity of seeing the result of his rival's adventure,) and Paul Ricochet, who calmly submitted to Blouffe's directions, were stationed well armed in the passage leading

directly from the *porte-cochère* to the kitchen, the door of which was to be kept carefully shut. But previously to the different parties taking possession of their posts in accordance with this distribution, the Captain himself entered into the full occupation of *his*—which was no other than within the body of the tall clock-case, through the oval window of which he could command an ample view of all that took place in the kitchen, and where he felt himself perfectly secure from all suspicion on the part of the expected interloper, even supposing, according to Belpêche's hypothesis, that it was no ghost but an accomplice of Ricochet. This allotment of positions, and his own in particular, was the grand secret which the Captain had carefully kept to himself; and thus placed, he felt a momentary satisfaction which he little expected to have enjoyed on this perilous occasion. Having made up his courage to the sticking place, he squeezed himself into the clock-case, and with some difficulty, notwith-

standing his having thrown off the incumbrance of his cloak and jacket; and he lovingly hugged his cutlass in his arms, and held his pistol ready cocked in his hand, to fire right through at the very first symptoms of the midnight visitant.

Having received the farewell of his friends, the door was shut upon him, and he was solemnly jammed in with feelings of intense agony little less than might be supposed to seize on a vow-breaking nun, built up in her niche of punishment. His dusky face looked awfully ill through the glass window of the clock-case; and the ghastly dial-plate seemed to grin with satisfaction at having acquired so fitting a companion.

It now wanted a quarter of an hour to twelve. The associates retired to their quarters—and Blouffe was "left alone with his glory."

Ricochet clapped his ear occasionally to the kitchen door, but heard only the awful ticking of the clock and the deep breathing of the captain, with an attempt at a colloquial kind of

cough now and then, to keep his heart up. A quarter of an hour of fearful expectation passed over—and then the solemn burring of the striking-chain slowly announced the elevation of the hammer which was to sound the peal of midnight upon the bell of the clock. Down it came—twelve terrible strokes, every one of which tingled through and through the imprisoned Blouffe. The echo of the last stroke died away—and its faithful response, a deep and hollow groan, was immediately heard to proceed from the green-chamber. Ricochet grasped his weapon firmly—Belpêche's had nearly fallen through his trembling fingers. Both listened with acute attention, and they thought they heard a gurgling murmur from the Captain's throat, while the clock-case sounded in tremulous vibration, as if its tenant shook in every joint. Then again all was hushed. In an instant more a cautious footstep was heard, descending the stairs and pacing the kitchen. Ricochet's feelings were wound tightly up;

Belpêche's slipped loosely down. Both stood and eagerly listened for Blouffe's assault, ready to run, the one in upon the ghost, and the other out into the street. But no assault was sounded —no alarm made—and in a minute or two the retiring footsteps came lightly upon the listeners' ears—and then all was still.

Paul Ricochet could stand this no longer. He opened the kitchen-door, and fiercely rushed in; but no enemy, bodily or spiritual, was there. The viands which were laid as a lure upon the table had disappeared, but every thing else looked in *statu quo*. A sudden misgiving shot through him as to the safety of Captain Blouffe, and he thought it possible, after all, that some foul fiend *had* visited the place, and carried away the unhappy smuggler in his retreat. He quickly opened the door of the clock-case, and was nearly as much shocked as if Blouffe had *not* been there, by his body falling out against him, stiff, motionless, and, as he thought, dead; while the pistol and cutlass dropped clattering

on the floor. Nothing could be more ghastly than the Captain's whitey-brown face contrasted with the dazzling scarlet of his woollen cap; and as Paul dragged him towards the fire-place where the night lamp stood, his long boots came half off his legs and trailed after him, giving to his figure a most unnatural, or at best, a most corpse-like appearance of stiff and outstretched length.

"Monsieur Belpêche, Monsieur Belpêche! come here for God's sake!" cried Paul, while he almost strangled Blouffe in attempting to untie the double knot of his black neck handkerchief.

"I am here!" answered Belpêche, from the gate, which he was vainly endeavouring to drag open, it having been cautiously bolted and locked by Paul and Marguerite.

"A jug of water, a jug of water!" cried Paul; and no sooner had he said the word, than a very large jug full of the pure element was flung in the captain's face by the liberal hand

of Marguerite, who had rushed down stairs, with the widow and the other women, as soon as the alarm was sounded by Paul. This profuse ablution made Blouffe start suddenly into life: and Marguerite seeing that he did live, turned all her readiness of thought to the prevention of the disclosures which Belpêche was on the point of proclaiming. She ran quickly to the gate, and seizing him by the powdered tail, she led him backwards into the kitchen, despite his screaming and struggling; and he was with considerable difficulty at length convinced that it was under the hands of Marguerite that he suffered this infliction, and that he was once again in the midst of his coadjutors and allies.

Blouffe, after a few minutes, recovered his recollection, and with it a portion of his wonted impudence. Seeing himself to be safe and sound, he scouted all notion of fear—swore that he had only fallen asleep—and that he dreamt he had

seen the devil. More he could not tell; and thus finished the second night's watching, leaving the affair still more perplexed and inexplicable than ever.

CHAPTER VI.

The whole matter began now, however, to wear an extremely serious aspect. Whatever had been comical in the mishaps of the widow's two discomfited lovers was to be the last of that species of interest in this strange affair. The mystery was, in another trial, destined to be solved; and, as my readers have, I am sure, wished if not anticipated, it was fated that Paul Ricochet was to have the honour of bringing to light as much of the secret as ever could be discovered.

The thousand tongues of rumour had been during the days last described extremely busy in La Rochelle. They had insinuated themselves

into the mouths of all the babblers whose palates have a natural instinct to be so furnished. All other topics of scandalous report were for the time abandoned, and the strange secrecy that hung over the Widow Potdevin's dwelling was the theme of general surmise. All the little faction of disappointed suitors before mentioned were the busiest in the high wind of calumny and exaggeration, which now blew from all quarters, and in which the devil himself might have been proud to ride. The discharged hostler and the discarded tinman were the most dangerous slanderers of the fair fame of the respective objects of their former regard; for, added to the sourness of feeling which had turned all the milkiness of their nature to curds, they carried the authority which vested in them as the nearest neighbours to the scene of action. The gossips were all abroad, and the open-mouthed swallowers of evil report had their appetites supplied to repletion.

As the whole town was in a tumult of agita-

tion, it was impossible that the minions of authority could remain ignorant of what everybody knew, or pretended to know; and the consequence was a formal visitation to our inn by a whole posse of public officers, registers, and other official busy-bodies, the morning after Captain Blouffe's adventure in the clock-case. The widow and her three lovers, with Marguerite and the two assistant neighbours, whose natural propensity for tittle-tattle had been the chief means of propagating the rumours of the day, were all examined, and their testimony taken down in due form; and the investigation, in short, carried to the utmost lengths to which it was possible to stretch the elastic vagueness of conjecture. Had the memorable siege of their town been about to be reacted, a more melancholy weight of frowns could not have pressed upon the brows of the functionaries, nor a more dignified distortion of muscle have screwed up each mouth in the due pursiness of place and power. A prodigious quantity of snuff was

expended on the occasion, sufficient to have supplied the place of brains to half the official noodles of the land; and nods and winks were exchanged with a profuseness fitting such liberal proxies for the ideas they were intended to represent.

The depositions duly authenticated, and the magisterial mind made up, it was decided that Paul Ricochet was to have his fair chance of catching the ghost, and clearing up his own character, which was perseveringly assailed by the inuendos of Belpêche, all of which found a very ready recipient in the jaundiced and jealous mind of Blouffe, whence they issued again in double distilled asperity.

When "the authorities" in France lay their hand on (or put their foot in) any private speculation, be it of what nature it may, they are sure never to let go their hold while a remnant of the concern hangs together. It was not to be expected then that they would even for a moment resign the station they had once assumed

in the domestic difficulties of the widow Potdevin; and she was therefore by no means surprised when she found that a couple of tall, booted, and belted Gens-d'armes were billetted upon her house, at her expence, the only part of the nuisance which prevented its being gratuitous on the part of "the authorities." These mixed epitomes of the civil and military power took possession of the warmest seats in the chimney corner, ordered the best breakfast and dinner, and adapted themselves to the most comfortable ways and usages of the house, with a phlegmatic condescension that abounds in the corps to which they belonged; but is not essentially national in France, for beyond the licensed inflictions of the armed police, one does not there meet with the cool and matter of-course exactions which every Jack-in-office lays on elsewhere. The two Gens-d'armes had received public orders to afford every protection and assistance to the widow and her maid, which the nature of their cases might require, to aid

Paul Ricochet in his efforts at discovering the author of the midnight proceedings; and there was, besides, a private article in their instructions, which commanded a strict *surveillance* over every person, and thing, and word, and action, and thought, that might by any possibility come under their cognizance.

The day wore over heavily enough to the inmates of the house, who felt ill at ease at the sight of the living badges of executive suspicion affixed to it. A number of idle gaping gossips were constantly dropping in and out, and every thing, in short, wore an air of considerable discomfort. The widow made it a point that Paul should remain constantly beside her; and Belpêche and Blouffe voluntarily established themselves of the household, and being rendered extremely valorous by the presence of the Gens-d'armes, they freely offered to sit up again that night, and give their powerful aid in sifting the secret doings towards the discovery of which they had already so much contributed. Paul

could not refuse their offer to share his watch, without giving a colour to the imputations they had set afloat against him; so it was decided that another well planned scheme for final discovery was to be that night carried into effect, should the creator of their disquietudes not have taken fright at the dreadful note of preparation so loudly and so publicly proclaimed.

In pursuance of the plan laid down, the women retired to their beds early—the lights were extinguished—and the five male guardians of the premises were closely and silently huddled together, on mattresses spread on the floor of the little back parlour, which was concealed from the view of the stairs, but so near as to allow of a ready seizure of any unwitting interloper who might venture into its perilous neighbourhood. At eleven o'clock every man was lying in his place—Blouffe the farthest from the door—Ricochet next to it—and they one and all counted, with varying pulsation, the seconds

as they steadily and solemnly struck upon the kitchen clock and the ear of night.

Time, like an experienced old hack, in his usual unaccommodating way, neither advanced nor retarded his rate of going one instant. Midnight came slowly and surely round, and the clock struck loud and strong, with the most impenetrable indifference to the nervous anxieties within its sound. Again its echoes expired—and again their faint tone was taken up by the low deep groan from the green-chamber. Again Paul Ricochet involuntarily closed his hand tight upon his sword, and again did Belpêche and Blouffe shake and shiver in the cold sweat of trepidation. The Gens-d'armes took the whole business very quietly, and held their carbines cocked and bayonets fixed ready for whatever result might happen.

A few repetitions of the groans were duly uttered—and then the cautious tread of the former night was heard, pat, pat, pat, along the corridor above. The footsteps gently approached

the stairs, and presently the creaking of the old wood announced the descent of a foot upon the upper step. Another, and another, and another! And now Paul Ricochet rose slowly on one knee, with as much deliberation as though he feared the internal machinery of nerve and sinew might be heard on their muscular hinges. Advancing his sword arm cautiously out, he only waited the arrival of the mysterious visitant at the very foot of the stairs to spring upon it, be it man or demon; and in a minute more he would no doubt have effected that grand purpose, had not a violent increase of bodily agitation on the part of either Blouffe or Belpêche, or both, set into motion the whole parade of glass and crockery on the table beside them. The rattling noise which this occasioned received a considerable addition from the reciprocally reproachful, "Hush!" and "Silence!" and "Be quiet!" and "Rest tranquil!" bandied backwards and forwards between the causes of the disturbance. Rico-

chet listened keenly—and watched for the descending foot, but in vain. A pause of a moment or two was succeeded by a rapidly retreating step up stairs; and when Paul rushed out from his concealment, with a lamp in one hand and his sword in the other, he only caught a glimpse of a tall figure in the act of gaining the very top of the flight. Up he sprang, and away it fled. The Gens-d'armes followed clattering after, and Blouffe and Belpêche, afraid to be left alone, brought up the rear with all possible diligence.

The figure rushed quickly along the corridor, but Paul was gaining on it fast when it reached the door of the green-chamber. There it entered, and as Paul pursued, he heard the door bolted on the inside. He put his foot first and next his shoulder to this obstacle. It resisted the one effort, but gave way to the other, when Paul in the over violence of his exertions came sprawling into the middle of the room, his lamp tumbling out of his hand and instantly ex-

tinguished. At the same moment the opposite door was closed, and the key turned on the other side by the escaping figure. To force this was the work of some minutes, for it opened on the inside; but Paul, as soon as he got on his legs (the Gens-d'armes affording a light, procured from Madame Potdevin's lamp) worked hard with the tongs until he effected his object. The door once opened, up-stairs and down-stairs the searchers laboured—but all in vain. Nothing was to be found.

Convinced that in the garrets above no living thing was lurking, and joined by the enervated *reinforcement* of Belpêche, Blouffe, and the women, who would none of them remain within, the party proceeded forthwith into the stable-yard, and there every nook was once more tried with the same result as before.

But the search was not now to be abandoned while one possible hiding place remained unpoked into. To the stable, therefore, they proceeded, and rack and manger, and even the

bedding of the two old horses, thereon quietly reposing, were turned over and examined with a scrupulousness worthy of the military police. The lofts alone remained unexplored. Paul and the official examiners soon mounted there, and with great assiduity they all three commenced stabbing into the several heaps of hay and straw with which the place was filled. They each took a different compartment, but no groan nor other acknowledgment of injury replied to the scrutiny of their weapons. In utter despair of success, yet convinced that the object of their search lay somewhere cunningly concealed, they descended ; and they were all proceeding with most discontented murmurings to the house, when Paul Ricochet suddenly stopped, and looked, with a mixture of surprise, satisfaction, and horror, at the bayonet of one of the Gens-d'armes, which glittered in the moon-light, as he paced onwards. Drops of blood were trickling from the blade.

Paul called the attention of his comrades to this ensanguined proof that their scrutiny *had* reached some victim. The hearts of the disappointed Gens-d'armes revived—Blouffe's did not revolt from the sight of blood—but those of Belpêche, the widow, and Marguerite sunk within them. Belpêche felt a sudden faintness once more steal over him, and he was obliged to lean against the pump for support, while Marguerite drew freely on its resources to re-animate his failing spirits. Blouffe and the widow stood by to help in his recovery, while the three more gallant spirits returned to the stable loft, and recommenced their search.

They carefully turned over the bundles of hay in the direction where the blood-stained bayonet had pierced before; and in a few minutes they did indeed discover the victim of its too successful search.

The unfortunate being now dragged forth unresistingly, presented a melancholy spectacle to the eyes of Paul, and even the hardened

bosoms of the Gens-d'armes felt a throb of pity, when they beheld the object before them. It was the identical figure that had fled from Paul's pursuit—a man, tall, old, emaciated, whose strength must have been quite exhausted in his effort to escape, and the last drainings of whose heart's blood seemed oozing from the deadly wound gaping in his side. His head was bald, with the exception of some loose grey locks flowing at the back and sides; his beard was grizzly and matted, and concealed the natural expression of his gasping mouth. His other features were finely formed, the forehead high, broad, and prominent, announcing both talent and energy of mind. His dark eyes were strained wide with agony, but still displayed a bright and bold expression. His nose was aquiline, and the forward chin was in unison with the determined cast which marked the whole physiognomy. His dress was ragged and filthy, denoting long neglect and confinement to the place where he was now discovered.

A loose coat hung upon his meagre form, which had evidently pined away from its naturally full and powerful structure. His hands were well shaped, and bore evidence that they never had been used for ignoble purposes. The whole appearance indicated, in fact, a wreck of dignity and grace, manly beauty and commanding power.

While Ricochet and the Gens-d'armes, in their hurried and cursory observations, saw enough of all this to fill them with involuntary awe, the hapless object of their astonishment was bleeding rapidly to death.

Paul, whose ready head came always to the aid of a warm heart, proposed an immediate removal of the apparently expiring man to the shelter of the house. The Gens-d'armes were not so prompt in taking this view of the case, for they doubted whether it was in accordance with the criminal law to remove a culprit from the place where he met his death without proper authority, under the hand of the civil magistrate.

To these objections, Paul briefly remarked, that, in the first place, the gentleman (he could not help according this title to him) was not dead; and next that, even if he were, no proof existed of his being a culprit; but that, on the contrary, they themselves might each just then be standing in that capacity, for having (even accidentally) inflicted a mortal wound upon a possibly innocent and unoffending citizen.

At this well put and forcible argument (which the men it was put to, instantly acknowledged and acted on), the prisoner raised his eyes, a faint smile played on his features, and he made an approving motion of the head. And that was the last proof he would consent, or condescend, to give of any understanding with those who came near him.

In a little while he was carried safely, though with great difficulty, down from the loft into the yard. The night air seemed for a moment to refresh him. At sight of his helpless form, all Captain Blouffe's small stock of courage revived,

and his natural brutality burst forth. He was with difficulty prevented by Paul from plunging his cutlass into the dying man! Belpêche shewed his manly weakness, by weeping hysterically over the sad object. The widow, Marguerite, and the female friends displayed all the sympathy with suffering so natural to the sex. They brought water and wine more quickly than the supporters of the body could reach the house, and they made kind but unavailing efforts to offer these simple and ready means of relief, which were obstinately rejected by the being before them, who seemed resolved to die.

The widow's heart, rather than her humanity, began to fail her as they entered the house.

"Must the poor creature be brought in *here*, Paul?" asked she, in a hesitating tone, as if half ashamed of the appearance of cruelty implied in the doubt.

"To be sure he must," quickly replied Paul, "what else could be done with him?"

"Curse the fellow," cried Blouffe, "let him lie and die in the cow-house, or the stable—too good a fate for such a scoundrel."

"Come, come, my brave captain," retorted Paul, "none of your ferocity now. I will protect this dying man while a gasp of life remains in him—and if you disturb his last moments by your brutality, you shall answer for it to me at the very point of that cutlass. In what room shall we place the gentleman?" continued Paul, in a decided tone.

"Where so properly," said Marguerite, "as in the green chamber?"

"Yes, where he committed"—— Blouffe was adding in a somewhat subdued, but still brutal tone, when the stern countenance of the dying stranger caught his eye, and he turned away abashed, without power to finish his abusive sentence.

All seemed agreed in the correctness of Marguerite's suggestion, and the widow did not oppose an arrangement which confined the ob-

noxious necessity to a room already condemned to deadly suspicion, and so rendered, in fact, useless. To the green chamber, therefore, the party proceeded, and in the very bed where Potdevin had died was the bleeding stranger laid. He was watched closely by all around him, but no expression of remorse or uneasiness clouded his brow; and if a passing recollection of guilt had possession of his mind, his countenance at least did not betray it.

Paul Ricochet's first feeling, then, was to run in search of a surgeon, and he promptly proceeded on the errand; while one of the Gens-d'armes, with practised precaution, hastened to examine the place where the stranger had been hidden, the other remaining to watch the safety of the body. Marguerite with infinite readiness staid close by the bed side, forgetful of all former fears, applying such common and inefficient styptics as the house could afford.

Belpêche sat below at the kitchen fire with the widow, who had also the company of one of

her female neighbours; the other, as they took the duty alternately, giving aid to Marguerite in her attendance above stairs. Blouffe perceiving how ill-received had been his cruel speeches about the wounded sufferer, sneaked off somewhat out of temper with himself, but still more so with all the rest of the world, like all men conscious of their own worthlessness; and he was soon stretched in his hammock in the cabin of his cutter, fancying that he despised everybody out of it, because he knew himself to be deserving of their contempt.

Paul soon returned to the inn with a surgeon, who did not hesitate a moment to pronounce the stranger irrecoverably hurt, and fast approaching to his end. At this professional confirmation of their own conjectures, the Gens-d'armes agreed that not a moment was to be lost in informing the authorities of what had passed, in order that official cognizance might be taken on the spot of all that might elucidate the mysterious transaction.

Drowsily alive to the summons which called them to the discharge of their awful duty, the authorities, or that part of them whose office it was on such occasions to represent the whole, were assembled after an hour or two, yawning and rubbing their eyes, to take in the evidence of the green-chamber. Several of these persons, with the callous abruptness of public officers in general, entered into a personal examination of the dying man; and true to the system of French law, they began a string of interrogatories, every one of which tended to lead to the self-crimination of the subject of their inquiries. Murder, robbery, and a long black catalogue of crimes might have been established against the accused, had not the clear lamp of intellect burned brightly to the last, and either instinct or information as to the nature of his examiners determined him to persevere in utter silence. The rack not being yet revived, they had no chance of forcing a reply; and therefore all their questions as to name birth,

location, occupation, and the long train of usual etceteras, stood opposed in the official paper to so many blanks.

One of the functionaries, doubting the possibility of such obstinate contempt of himself and his august associates in any being not actually deprived of his mental faculties, suggested the likelihood of the stranger being a foreigner, and ignorant of the French language. This sagacious supposition met with considerable approbation; and as no one of the assembly was conversant with any other than his vernacular tongue, messengers were despatched in several directions, with strict mandates to various residents or sojourners in the town, of different nations, to repair forthwith to the scene of this sad inquiry. In consequence of the summons several persons attended, and the most harassing and assiduous efforts were made, in four or five different languages, to draw some reply from the expiring man. He stared at each new catechist, and preserved a determined silence throughout.

All efforts at discovering his nation, name, or quality being thus baffled, but one grand means remained to acquire that something in the way of information—that little peg, if I may use the homely phrase, on which official ingenuity might hang the robes of mock reality in which it too often disguises its most purely imaginary *facts*. That rarely-failing engine for extracting some acknowledgment, some doubt, or fear from the weakness of a death-bed was—religion. The priest was accordingly summoned, and he duly came, preceded by the imposing mummeries which degrade the beautiful doctrine they are impiously attached to, and obscure the minds it was meant to enlighten.

I will not dwell on the solemn mockery of holiness displayed by the bed-side of the fast expiring stranger. The Curé played his part—he exhorted, persuaded, threatened; called on the expiring sufferer to give one token of *the* faith—one acknowledgment, one hint of his belief. Heaven was held up for an instant in

faint perspective—and hell, the more powerful stimulus to a mind of weakness, was beginning to glow fiercely in the lurid eloquence of the priest, when the wearied sufferer turned his head aside. He made no sign—but he was dead!

A burst of astonished consternation ran through the bystanders when the surgeon announced the fact. Compassion had now room to flow freely, from hearts which had been till then bound up in official insensibility, like animals that retain the vital spark, within the air-excluding covering of wood or marble. Several could scarcely believe that the spirit was gone—for added to the innate incredulity with which men always witness the first touch of death, there was something so calm, so silent, so unstruggling in *this* instance of it, that it appeared impossible: and the little of mortal weakness or suffering evinced by the mysterious subject himself, gave rise to many a wild conjecture as to who and what he was. But of this hereafter.

Fast following the stream of pity came the freezing breath of selfishness, that unamiable but almost necessary instinct of imperfect man. All present soon turned their quick exchange of glances in upon themselves, and each asked how *he* might be affected by the event. The magistrates were one and all struck with the ear of blame and punishment, which they might well expect from the government for permitting, at such a period of political excitement, a stranger such as this to have been secreted in the town. The underlings present felt a deep sympathy in their employer's apprehensions, and much anticipation of regret for their possible removal from office—for they well knew their own would follow it. The doctor and the priest dreaded their share of reproach, the one for having suffered the dissolution of a body, and the other the escape of a soul. They were both aware that despotism is not over nice in its distinctions between right and wrong. And thus the electrical chain of self-interest was touched, and

the shock vibrated at once through every bosom which its links kept together.

The natural result of this common feeling was simultaneous efforts to discover some clue to the mystery before them; and in the failure of success, to frame the best possible excuses for their want of information. It will not be expected that I should enter into the minute description of the various kinds of dirty work employed on this occasion. Bribes and threats, spies and informers, and all the long train of device and subterfuge well known to the police, were put immediately into active service and remained long employed. But all to no purpose. Not a single trace of any kind could be discovered to lead to the knowledge of who this mysterious being was, where he came from, or why he was found in the place where he met his death. It appeared, that he must most industriously have destroyed any papers or other means of betrayal. Nothing came to light in his miserable retreat, but the close-gnawed

remnant of bones and crusts of bread, giving the most degrading feeling of the fate of one undoubtedly suited to the nobler purposes of life. Several plausible conjectures were soon afloat—many monstrous suppositions got quickly abroad; but before I touch on either, I will close this long chapter, and allow the reader interested in its details to form his own opinions upon them.

CHAPTER VII.

PASSING over many of those suppositions which the nature of the particular circumstances and the then situation of the country gave rise to, I will state but one, the most consistent with probability, and which obtained general credence among the best informed and most rational of the inhabitants of La Rochelle. It was, that the unknown was one of the several persons of distinction implicated in the plot which originated "The Infernal Machine;" and that on the failure of that diabolical conspiracy, he had fled from Paris, and secre ly taken refuge with Potdevin, who there was strong reason to suspect had some connection with the political

intrigues then going forward. The sudden death of the inn-keeper, which the most minute reconsideration of the circumstances, left no doubt of being produced by the natural cause originally assigned, had in all likelihood thrown the concealed stranger into the utmost want of the very means of subsistence; and it was probably while waiting the expected arrival of some accomplice in his and Potdevin's doings, that he was forced to have recourse to the stratagems already detailed, for terrifying the widow from opposing his midnight depredations. The ways of the house must have been familiar to him; and it will be recollected that some person was often over-heard by Madame Potdevin in night conferences with her husband, immediately before the period of his death. Such was the least complicated, and most rational reasoning on this strange subject; and to the conclusions it led I have no hesitation in subscribing my opinion.

But there were many who could by no means

consent to receive as fact, such a very simple elucidation as this. The love of the marvellous still exists strong enough to make the vulgar prefer a mysterious supposition to a plain recital. To such it was in vain to apply the common arguments of reason. They were listened to with impatience by *the many* of the class immediately involved in Madame Potdevin's adventures, and even by *the few* with considerable reluctance—and they made no impression on the credulous mass that loved a tale of terror. By them, then, it was decided, irrevocably too, that poor Potdevin *was* murdered, that the stranger was his murderer, that the measure of his punishment was filled, not merely in his own violent death, but in the circumstance of his expiring in the very bed where he had strangled his unfortunate victim—and finally, that the inn would be haunted by his most uneasy ghost for ever and ever. But others went even farther than this, and pronounced it as their distinct belief that no being, merely

mortal, could have succeeded so completely to have baffled the scrutiny of the police, which was in their notion *almost* omniscient. They therefore concluded, that some fiend in human form had been for awhile let loose, and had commenced his sport in the purlieus of the inn, and they stoutly maintained that there was something in his bold death-daring demeanour which by no means guaranteed the town from his very speedy re-appearance. Had the taste for vampires, in all their horrors, been at that period revived, the good people of La Rochelle would no doubt have placed the mysterious stranger among that amiable and blood sucking race.

Altogether, a bad name was firmly fixed upon the inn, and that even before the unfortunate stranger was removed from it to the grave, where the worms below were not more busy at his body, than the reptiles above at his reputation. As soon as he was buried, and that an utter hopelessness was established of gaining any posthumous proof of his identity, a regular

proces verbal was dressed (*dressé*) in the most becoming suit of masquerade costume, and transmitted to the Grand Depot of manufactured humbugs at the *Police generale* of Paris. Glad of giving proofs of the authenticity of my recitals, where records exist, and are within my reach, I will subjoin here a copy, and a translation of the official documents relating to this subject. I procured them with some difficulty through the intervention of a friend; and they may perhaps possess some little interest, as a model of the way "they do these things in France," independently of any which attaches to them from their local connection with the transaction I have related.

As I could not, consistently, with proper respect to the majesty of these state papers, intrude a less dignified subject into the same chapter with them, I will return, in another, to the topic of the widow Potdevin's amorous designs, and shew as a moral how true lovers were, as they ought always to be, made happy.

NOTE.

I VERY much regret being, after all, unable to redeem the foregoing pledge; and am forced to let that inability belie the assertion which stands above recorded, that I had *procured* the documents in question. The fact was, I had only obtained the *promise* of them; but that so positive on the part of my friend, that we were both quite certain of its performance. But if the reader knew the difficulty of extracting any thing of this kind from the provincial archives of France, he would, I am sure, grant a full pardon for my failure. It is scarcely to be believed what trouble was taken in the present instance, to get a copy of the papers relative to "le révenant de la Rochelle," as my mysterious stranger is still called in the scene of his fatal adventure. Heaps of official rubbish have been destroyed since the epoch of my story; quantities had been transferred to Paris, and still more to Saintes, another departemental depôt for such records. Enough, however, remained to give my friend incalculable trouble; but all his

researches have ended in disappointment; and we cannot resist the suspicion that some important secret did really lurk in the pages of the *Proces Verbal*, which was the cause of its being withheld, if not altogether suppressed. But it is perhaps of no consequence. The production of those guarantees for the authenticity of my story would have been certainly material, for my own satisfaction; but my readers will probably, even without such testimony, give the same degree of credit to the accuracy of the facts here recorded, as my other recitals have already succeeded in obtaining.

CHAPTER VIII.

From the memorable night on which the stranger died, Paul Ricochet, at the positive request of Madame Potdevin, regularly took up his residence, bed and board, at the inn. This became now a point of actual necessity for the tranquillity of the widow's mind, and of Marguerite's also, for though all apprehension of downright danger was removed, still the terror excited by the eventful and mysterious occurrence preyed with real severity upon them. A thousand advantages might have been taken of the dubious character now attached by common consent to the house (and which the malignant, the envious, and the idle, are always

prone to seize on) had not the sturdy protection of such a man as Paul been at hand. But, with him, as the avowed champion of the widow's reputation, and the received candidate for a still more legitimate responsibility, the tongues of the most talkative gradually became dumb, and the old frequenters of the house came back by degrees to give it their countenance again. The kitchen soon resumed its wonted appearance of carousing and jollity, the widow recovered her good looks, and Marguerite's smile wore even more than its usual vivacity.

Paul Ricochet had been the actual and undoubted means of developing the secret, on the discovery of which depended the widow's generous reward of ten thousand francs, a sum that would have been extravagant had it not been for the additional clause which proved that she meant herself to accompany the gift. The widow never for one moment doubted that if the secret were to be discovered at all, Paul Rico-

chet was the man to discover it. She knew that the amiable weakness of Belpêche, and the swaggering poltroonery of Blouffe, were quite incompetent to the performance of any such feat, and it was even whispered that at the time she held out the liberal inducement to exertion, she had been in some measure infected with the suspicions of Paul's rivals, and that she was more pleased than angry at the notion of *his* having played off the trick from his over ardour to secure what she felt convinced was the great object of his hopes, herself. She therefore, the very day after the tragical event which entitled him to his well-earned recompense, made known to him her intention immediately to ratify the engagement she had signed at his suggestion; and then, being amply convinced that Paul was perfectly innocent of all complicity in the midnight alarms, she persuaded herself, with the ease of a fond woman, that she should have never forgiven such an outrage on his part against all delicacy and affection towards her.

Either way, therefore, Paul Ricochet stood secure of the widow's regard, and he could not help seeing quite plainly that he had only to ask the "any other request," coupled with the promised pecuniary reward, to obtain the utmost extent of what it was meant to imply.

Under these circumstances it might have been supposed that Paul would at once have come forward with his demand for the widow's hand, and it was fully looked for by the gossiping neighbours all round that the marriage would be rushed into without any regard for appearances, or decent respect to the memory of poor Potdevin, whom the same sapient speculators without hesitation supposed to be utterly forgotten by wife and friend. But it was not exactly so, or at least sufficient of their respective relations to the deceased innkeeper were remembered to tell them what was due to a decent regard to their own reputations and interests. Paul declared every where that he had not the least notion of marrying the widow, and the widow,

half whimpering, half tittering, talked much of the merits of her defunct spouse, and endeavoured to speak lightly and slightingly of Paul. But there was an invariable weight in her words, or their pronunciation, which kept her tongue dwelling on the latter theme, unlike the glib and rapid passages of speech which cursorily touch upon some object of real indifference. The widow, in fact, could no more give weight to her affected grief than lightness to her deep felt hopes; but still she saw the absolute necessity of showing a fair attention to the observances of the world, and resolved to let a tolerably decent length of time pass over before she even acknowledged her intention of marrying again.

Paul never shewed the least desire to push the affair farther than seemed consistent with Madame Potdevin's inclinations, and she amply felt the force of this apparent delicacy towards her. He received, in virtue of her engagement, the regular transfer of ten thousand francs in the French funds, a large sum for him to become

the possessor of, but small in comparison with the widow's wealth; and those who knew Paul Ricochet's cautious and calculating character, were little surprised at his using no abruptness towards her, which might altogether mar his almost present certainty of more than ten times the sum he had received. It certainly was not probable that the widow would have been much alarmed or at all displeased at a bold outbursting of Paul's yet unuttered passion; but still, it was argued, he was not a fellow to trust to *probabilities*, when it seemed sure that by letting the widow's attachment take its own course, she would herself bring the point to a conclusion, and thus allow him to make whatever terms he chose. But besides the widow's prudential and worldly reasons for not indecently hurrying on a second union, so fresh upon the shocking suddenness of her former husband's death, there was an obstacle just then in force, in the interval of six weeks before Christmas during which the Roman Catholic Church prohibits its members

from contracting marriages. It is to be hoped the priests keep a sharp look out after the morality of their parishioners during the thousands of melting *tête-à-têtes* which take place on the chilly evenings of that season.

During all this period the widow took unceasing pains to prove to Marguerite, to whom she gave her whole confidence, that her interests should not suffer from the change which she premeditated in her own situation. She assured her faithful bar-maid that she would stipulate with her new husband, be he whom he might, that an ample settlement should be made on her, to ensure her a respectable match and a sufficient independence for a person in her station, upon the foundation of which she and the man of her choice might follow the prudent example of poor Potdevin and herself, and realize a good fortune. Marguerite, who had been always remarkable for her generous easy temper, seemed little affected by the projected change in the widow's situation. She never repined at what

must certainly ensure a very great diminution in the portion on which she had every right to reckon during Potdevin's lifetime. She took the widow's assurances in a light and disinterested way, and she did not even utter one murmur at the profuseness of the reward given to Paul Ricochet, although it made a very sensible deduction from what was now likely to come to her own share.

But with all this contented submission to whatever might happen as to her fate and fortune, Marguerite had a sound understanding, and she knew enough of the world to know the serious value of looking fairly and prudently to one's own interests, without a just attention to which, it is almost impossible ever to be able to forward those of another. She had, besides, some staunch and steady friends, and one attached and faithful adviser, in whom she reposed the most implicit confidence. Acting, therefore, upon the prudential reasonings of those who knew human nature better than she did, and who thought

that no dependance was to be placed on promises that were liable to the shifting of every caprice, she, in a calm and guarded, and not offensive manner, began a series of quiet inducements to persuade her mistress to fix beyond all doubt of change the provision that she so kindly and generously intended to make for her. As this was done in a way not to startle that tendency towards avaricious considerations, which I fear is too often found lurking about the middle of the path of life, the widow took it all in good part; and being, as I have before intimated, not only a friendly and generous, but a shrewd and sensible person, she soon saw that she might at once, perhaps, get Marguerite more cheaply off her hands than, by letting her linger long, allow her expectations to accumulate at compound interest. She therefore resolved at once to settle a certain sum upon Marguerite, and the only thing that puzzled her, was the amount of the sum to be settled. She wished to steer clear of tinginess, and she was resolved to do nothing

extravagant:—in fact, she did grudge every louis put out of her power of bestowing upon Paul, her regard for whom had added a tenfold value to her possessions.

In this dilemma, and swayed backwards and forwards by a great number of contending calculations and considerations, she resolved upon consulting Paul Ricochet himself. She thought there could be no doubt but such a communication would lead to his actual confession of his views upon herself, and that she might, by shewing him how completely his own interest was involved, gain a decided sanction to the rather niggardly amount at which she had almost fixed Marguerite's intended portion. In consequence of this, one frosty day, when Marguerite had just left the house on an errand to some distance, looking as rosy and crisp as if she did not give a thought to her pecuniary concerns, the widow pulled her rush bottomed arm-chair closer to the fire in the little parlour, and told Paul to draw nearer the three legged stool on which he

sat smoking a cigar; and she began something as nearly as possible to the following conversation, darning a table-cloth, while Paul continued smoking all the while.

Widow. Well, Paul—it's a cold day.

Paul. Yes, Madame.—(puff!)

Widow. And, Paul—are you warm?

Paul. Not very, Madame.

Widow. Paul—come a little closer to the fire, can't you?

Paul. Yes, Madame.—(puff!)

Widow. Now, Paul, you know what an opinion I have of you—that is, Paul, of your good sense and prudence—and—

Paul. Yes, Madame.

Widow. Well, then, Paul, I have to consult you on a very serious affair—and, Paul, I want your honest, candid opinion—and I know you wont deceive me? Will you, Paul?

Paul. No, Madame.—(puff, puff!)

Widow. You know Marguerite, Paul?

Paul. Yes, Madame.—(puff, puff, puff!)

Widow. Very well, Paul; it is my intention to settle something independent upon her—don't you think me right, Paul?

Paul. Yes, Madame.—(puff, puff!)

Widow. But, do you know, I am very much puzzled.

Paul. No, Madame.

Widow. Well, but I tell you I *am*. Do you know what it is about, Paul?

Paul. No, Madame.—(puff!)

Widow. How dull you are to-day, Paul!

Paul. Yes, Madame.—(puff, puff!)

Widow. Then it is, Paul, to know—how much I should settle on Marguerite.

Paul. (Puff, puff, puff!)

Widow. Paul!

Paul. Madame!

Widow. Did you hear what I said?

Paul. Yes, Madame.

Widow. Do you understand me?

Paul. No, Madame.—(puff!)

Widow. Well, then, since you will, Paul,

force me to speak plainer—I want your opinion —as to the amount I ought to settle on this girl. Stop, don't answer me in a hurry—consider a moment, Paul—consider just a moment, how much my interest is concerned—how much those of another person—those of yourself, Paul, are at stake—consider—

Paul. (Taking his cigar from his mouth, and dashing it into the fire) Now, I tell you what, Madame Potdevin, you know I am a man of few words; but when I speak, I like to speak to the purpose. I know my interest *is* concerned—it would be deceiving you and myself if I affected not to think so. Therefore, I have no opinion on the subject—and what's more, I would not give it even if I had one.

Widow. (Not at all comprehending *this* kind of delicacy) Why now, really, Paul, this is very odd of you—it is indeed, Paul. But, Paul, *have* you no opinion on a point that is after all—as much perhaps your affair as it is mine? What would people say to this?

Paul. Mark me, Madame Potdevin, no one shall have a word to say against me in this matter, let what will happen. Your money is your own—do with it as you like! (Here Paul rose up and prepared to quit the room.)

Widow. One word, Paul—but one word—Do you think—ten thousand francs enough?

Paul. (As he strode out into the kitchen) Ten thousand francs! Since you ask me the question plainly, I plumply answer, no. Considering that Marguerite has helped to make all your fortune—considering that had Potdevin lived or made a will she would have had at least half of it—I do think that ten thousand francs would be a shabby portion. That, once for all, is my opinion, Madame—and more I will never say. You may give the girl what you like—more or less—no matter how my own interest gains or suffers—no reproach shall rest on me anywhere. Good morning, Madame Potdevin.

And thus ended the colloquy.

Now, the abrupt and bullying tone assumed

by Paul on this occasion might possibly have produced a very bad effect to his disfavour, had it not been addressed to a woman, body and soul, flesh and blood, skin and bone, in love. But with females in that disastrous predicament, particularly if they enjoy that "second spring," which one of our poets somewhere talks of, perhaps this very tone is the one most likely to be best received. It is very certain that women so circumstanced will bear willingly an air of authority from the man they love, though they do not, it may be, go the lengths ascribed to them by the proverbial saying, which compares them to spaniels, but which no author, that I recollect, has ventured to exemplify in action but Moliere in his character of Pourceynage's wife.

There is no knowing what Madame Potdevin would not have borne, had Paul been her husband on that day, and her lovesick fit been still alive. As things were, the sharp lecture she received produced a very striking and powerful

effect. That very day she repaired to the honest notary (for there was one such in the town) who had drawn up all her deceased husband's and her own papers, and, while the warm beam of generosity was upon her, she settled upon Marguerite, beyond the power of revocation, the sum of twenty thousand francs, by the same process which she had before adopted in her recompense to Paul, a transfer of so much stock in the public funds.

That evening she assembled Paul, Marguerite, Belpêche, the notary, and a few other friends, in the memorable little parlour, and she there, in a very off-hand and liberal manner, informed the circle of what she had done, and deposited the paper which secured the money in Marguerite's own hands.

At this strong proof of regard and generosity, and actuated by feelings known best to herself, Marguerite burst into tears, and sobbed forth the warmest expressions of gratitude. She now found herself, indeed, more independent than

ever she could have hoped for, though certainly not as rich as she might formerly have calculated on some time or other becoming. She had now the controul of a large sum of money, while youth and spirits were revelling within her—how much better than the expectancy of five times as much at her mistress's death, when the sap of her own life would be wasted away in the anxious watchings for the treasure, dearly bought by years of slavery and doubt! She held the paper unconsciously in her hand, until the fast falling tears had almost washed out the widow's signature, when the sharp-eyed notary removed it from its critical position.

During the progress of this scene, Paul Ricochet did not speak a word. When Madame Potdevin announced the amount of the settlement made on Marguerite, he started half up from his chair—a very rare instance of being thrown off his guard—but immediately recovering himself, he looked thoughtful and dull for the rest of the evening—and the witnesses, one

and all, remarked to each other on their way home that it was a pity such an ungenerous narrow minded fellow should ever have the controul of the liberal widow's person and possessions.

The widow herself was painfully struck with Paul's apparent disapproval of what she had done in pursuance of his opinion, if not actually his suggestion. She thought she could perceive that he retracted his liberal view of the case. She lamented her indiscreet profusion a moment, but she was certain in the next that it must have pleasingly proved to him his influence over her; and she thought the best way to reconcile him to its irrevocable consequence was to boldly lead to the important subject, which she felt to be the uppermost in his breast as in her own. She therefore briefly and blushingly addressed the assembled party, to the effect, that having now in two instances relieved her mind from a weight of obligation, and given independence and respectability to Marguerite, she had

to touch upon a matter which involved much of her own happiness, and might affect *perhaps* that of another. The love-sick emphasis of that "perhaps" was fairly levelled at Paul. She could not speak much plainer, but she closed her address by saying, that, as many obstacles would be soon removed to the granting of *any* request which Paul might, in reason, make, and which she felt herself in honour bound to grant according to her pledge, she would fix her own fête day, the third of the next month, January, when she would, in presence of the chosen party then assembled, and amidst the annual congratulations and blessings of her friends, and under the auspices of Saint Geneviève, her patron and namesake, be prepared to receive Paul's request; and she hoped to grant it with the same cordiality and pleasure in which she had no doubt it would be asked.

The widow breathed more freely when her speech was finished, and, for the first time in her life, she felt relieved when Paul took his

candle and walked upstairs to bed. She willingly found excuses for his embarrassment of air, in the rush of anticipated happiness in which she felt it but natural for him to indulge. She embraced Marguerite more affectionately than ever, as they mutually took possession of their beds, still in the same chamber; and Marguerite's convulsing sobbings of gratitude were rather a lullaby than an interruption to the placid repose of Madame Potdevin, on this the happiest night she had spent for many a year.

CHAPTER IX.

During the two or three weeks following the night last alluded to, the parties concerned in the momentous question about to be asked, and calculated upon as certain to be acceded to, mingled with their several occupations serious thoughts respecting the approaching fête of Saint Geneviève. Madame Potdevin indeed did many things about her house; but she thought of but one, and the associate points diverging from it. The manner in which Paul would pop the question—what she should say in reply—how she should look—when she should fix the marriage, and many such other self-put and self-answered queries arose upon her mind in

quick and vapoury succession. Every matter of mere business sounded buzzingly in her brain; and had not Marguerite had a little more command of herself, the affairs of the inn would have gone into a woeful confusion.

But Marguerite, too, had reason to look to the coming day with anxiety, if it were merely as it might affect her own future situation; for it was very questionable indeed if the arrangements it was to produce might not wholly change her situation in life, and probably banish her from her early home for ever.

Paul Ricochet felt, and justly too, that the most serious moment of *his* life was at hand—that important one in which he was not only to choose his own destiny but that of another, loading himself with a double weight of responsibility, for his own happiness and her's. He pondered well upon that coming day, and the course he was to pursue; for he knew that his reputation for good sense, good feeling, fair play, and manliness was at stake. To give him

time to cogitate more at his ease, and uninterrupted by the bustling realities of life, he took once more to his fishing-boat, which he had for some time neglected. He had her cleaned up afresh, new caulked, new painted, and re-rigged. He had his nets all mended, and his lines all leaded, hooked, and baited. He assorted his crew from among his old comrades; and, with his complement of nine men and two boys, he once more prepared to put to sea, leaning against the rudder of his floating home, as proud, as independent, and as despotic on her little deck as any admiral in the fleet.

The herring fishery was now in its full season, and the annual ceremony of "blessing the sea" was about to be enacted. A long procession of priests, with their attendants, tapers, incense boxes, and all the paraphernalia of their mystery, marched regularly from the town to the sea-side; and there, gazed at by all the idle and gaping part of the population, but sympathised with only by a few of the fishermen and

those connected with them, the waves received the benediction which was supposed to penetrate into their deep recesses, and to act as a charm on the shoals of piscatory wanderers that floated through their pathless ways. Among all the followers of the reverend magicians, no one uttered more fervent responses to their invocations for large draughts and fine weather than the widow Potdevin; and Marguerite echoed her mistress's prayers with a due and becoming sincerity of tone and mien.

Paul Ricochet all the while, with his arms folded and a cigar in his mouth, lounged carelessly against the rudder, which he anxiously longed to direct once more; and when the procession returned towards the town, while the chanting priests were still within hearing, he gave the order for hoisting sail, and away his little vessel scudded with a light and favouring breeze. His was the first to sail. Twenty others soon followed its track, and the little fleet moved gallantly away, tacking and manœuver-

ing to clear the harbour and avoid running foul of each other, with great skill and much picturesqueness. As the leading boat passed the pier and bounded over the breakers which dashed upon the bar, the master at the helm, Paul Ricochet, took off his red woollen cap for the last time of saluting, and waved it courteously (with the respectful air of the poorest Frenchman's salutation to the lowliest female of the land,) towards the spot where Madame Potdevin and Marguerite stood. The widow was almost overcome, and leaned more heavily upon her handmaid's arm, and they waved their pocket handkerchiefs in signal of their good wishes, until Paul and his little boat were no longer to be distinguished from the others, as they were half hidden or imperfectly revealed by the heaving of the billows.

For four and twenty hours Ricochet and his fellow fishermen remained as usual out at sea, and with the flowing of the tide the following day the little fleet of boats came into the bay

again, one by one, without any precedence from any title but good sailing, or any salute but that of the expectant fish-women who hailed them from the pier. Among the scattered groups of these pickled and preserved retailers, who stood up or sat upon their empty baskets watching the boats as they approached, was to be discovered the figure of Madame Potdevin, throwing out the bait of her anxious looks with which she hoped to entice Paul Ricochet into the tangly meshes of the matrimonial net. His boat at length appeared working its way merrily into the harbour, its little streamer of blue serge floating at the mast head ; and ropes, and sails, and sides all shining brilliantly in the frosty sunbeams—being, like all the others, thick covered with the scales of the hundreds of scores of herrings with which it was filled. Ricochet stood as usual at the helm, and he and his crew one and all wore upon their cheeks the healthy bloom painted by the rough wings of the ocean breeze. A well pleased look beamed

on every countenance, the signal of a successful haul; but the moment Paul's eyes fell upon the widow an air of involuntary confusion overspread his face. This her quick glance perceived, and her heart interpreted it with no unpleasing solution. The men forming his crew observed it as well, and wondered what the deuce could revive the abstracted look with which he had during the live-long day gazed down into the sea, fathoming, with his glances, regions too deep for fish.

For the remaining days of the month of December Paul took but few holidays, but made the most of the fine clear frosty weather, catching large cargoes of fish, and pondering on the deep subject which evidently worked upon his mind; and on the evenings when he happened not to be out at sea, his manner was, in spite of all his efforts, constrained and stiff, a change which occasioned much astonishment to the widow, whose supple feelings found no sympathy in his.

I have stated that Belpêche was a cautious, calculating, crafty old fellow; and all his actions proved that he possessed that left-handed cleverness, which enabled him to see and turn to advantage most of the weak points of another. He had treasured up some plain proverbial axioms, which he formed into a code for the regulation of his conduct, and a standard by which to calculate the probable conduct of others. Without enumerating these, it is enough to state that they consisted chiefly of such prudential sayings, as "patience and perseverance;" "'Tis a long lane that has no turning;" "Many a slip 'twixt cup and lip;"—and, with some one or other of these ever in his thoughts, though they seldom escaped his tongue, he never abandoned any pursuit, merely because appearances were against success. On this principle he had acted through life. He had chosen for his garden-ground a piece of land the most apparently unfavourable, but by unwearied care he overcame every impediment to making

it the best in the town, or around it. He tried a hundred odd and harsh experiments in planting, grafting, and pruning, but by dint of watching and waiting, he was sure to catch a favourable season or good symptom, and almost always succeeded. He thus, like a rattle-snake fascinating a bird, fixed his eye upon his object and kept his maw open; and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the victim fell in.

A man of less pertinacity or more sentiment, would have been sure to hide his head in a bed of his own cabbages, sooner than shew his face again at the inn, after the signal proofs of cowardice he had there displayed. But Belpêche made light of the disgrace, and, with a species of courage peculiar to some men, he braved the whole torrent of reproach and ridicule which was poured against him; and by the callousness of his demeanour under this kind of danger, he actually brought many people to think he had been calumniated with

respect to that other sort, which to most men is infinitely less to be dreaded. Regularly, then, did the old gardener come, more sprucely dressed than ever, more profusely furnished with bunches of geranium, myrtle, and other evergreens, emblematic of his passion, to pay his daily court and courtly compliments to the widow Potdevin. He gave to all these assiduities the appearance of unshaken devotion to her, although he acknowledged himself to have forfeited all chance for her favour; but it was all, in fact, the consequence of pure regard for himself. For he saw, or thought he saw, something mysterious in the bearing of Paul Ricochet. He did not exactly know what was in the wind—but he was determined that it should not be for want of a sharp look out, that it was not to blow good to him. Madame Potdevin received his continued attentions with great indifference; but valuing his respectable character and steady advice, she was glad to have him for a friend and witness to her late

important transaction, and to that most important of all with which she was about to usher in the new year.

And at length, the new year came fairly in, amidst a profusion of sweetmeats, and cakes, and comfits—solid edibles and empty compliments. It slipped so quietly into the footsteps of the year that was just gone, that, by those who had no strong motive to mark the time, the entrance and the exit might have been alike unnoticed. But to the objects of our present observation it was not so; and the first of January was marked with peculiar solicitude, chiefly because the *third* came so close upon it. And with the dawn of that self-same third of January, 1806, there was not one of the numerous name-sakes and votaries of Saint Geneviève, who opened her orisons with a greater flutter of spirit than Madame Potdevin, or continued them with more ardour, or finished them with higher hope. She was really fond of Paul Ricochet, and she longed for the coming hour, when she intended

plainly to say so to him and the whole world without reserve.

And sure enough that hour arrived—but not, alas! to answer the expectations of Madame Potdevin. Once more the little parlour assumed the important air of council-chamber consequence. The chosen friends were there—the new year's presents—the fête-day offerings—flowers from Belpêche, and fish from Paul, and sundry varieties of other gifts from all the widow's neighbours around. Amidst such a profusion of blooming things who could have thought that disappointment would have lurked, like a canker within the blossoms!

As the friends came in, one by one, or in pairs, or groups, the ready and ruddy cheeks of the widow presented themselves to the embraces of the visitors, gaining new bloom from the contact, instead of *giving* it, as the cheeks of other widows might do. Belpêche was one of the first at the levee, carrying a bouquet too large for any flower-pot to contain; and it was ac-

cordingly placed in a tub upon the round marble table, which, according to custom, graced the middle of the little parlour. The mantel-piece groaned with the inferior offerings of boxes of *bon-bons*, and little nick-nacks of foil and filagree and looking-glass combined, of the price of five francs down to one.

The widow's eyes glanced pleasedly upon these trifles, for the habit of receiving such tokens of kind feeling from one's neighbours, raises them much above their intrinsic value. But an object of a different nature was in the widow's thoughts, and she never considered the presents of her fête day friends so little worth.

At length Paul Ricochet came in. He was determined to be the last, that he might have a full room to keep him in countenance—not venturing to confront the single tenderness of the widow. He had dressed himself in his very best for the occasion. His fur cap and blue woollen jacket, with its brass buttons, the red scarf of netted worsted twined round his neck,

the green plush waistcoat, blue cloth trowsers, and huge brown boots, wrinkled half way up his thighs, were all spick and span new, as well as the pair of fox-skin gloves, which completed his costume from head to hand and foot. As he entered the room he doffed his cap, and bowing respectfully to the whole company, and particularly to the widow, he pulled off the hairy covering from his right hand, and held it out to Marguerite. She placed her's in it cordially, and from the rush of crimson to her cheeks, it was surmised that Paul gave her fingers about such a squeeze as he might have given to a halyard or a cable.

Every eye was turned upon Paul, and every ear straining to catch the sounds of his expected speech. He did not keep the company long in suspense; for standing bolt upright, and clapping the cap once more upon the side of his head, and holding Marguerite's hand steadily in his, he began as follows:—

"Madame Potdevin, I owe you a great many

obligations, and I am very grateful to you for them, and particularly for your generous bounty lately; and, so far, all is right! And now, Madame, I have a request to ask—and you promised to grant it—and I am sure you will—and, so far, all is right! Now, Madame—hold up your head, Marguerite! Now, Madame, need I ask the favour? Does not the whole thing speak for itself?—I hope you can't break faith and retract your promise, but that you will consent to my marrying Marguerite."

"Marry Marguerite!" exclaimed every one, the widow scarcely able to articulate the wonder-speaking exclamation.

"Aye, to be sure, and why not? Haven't we loved each other many a year, and without a soul knowing it but ourselves, secretly and faithfully? And so far all was right—wasn't it? Come, Madame Potdevin, you have made me independent of you."

"Indeed, indeed I have," sobbed the widow.

"And this is the way you repay her generosity!" cried the women.

"Let him go on"—whispered Belpêche.

"You have made me independent," continued Paul, letting go Marguerite's hand; and taking a greasy leather case from the inside pocket of his jacket, and untying the string that bound it, he drew forth a paper, and held it up to view. "Here is the document," continued he, "which gives me the ten thousand francs of your money. It is a large sum, a fortune for me; but not for ten times the amount—that is about your whole fortune perhaps—would I keep it, and let you, Madame, or any one living, say I took advantage of your generosity to use you ill."

With these words, he tore the assignment into scraps, and strewed them on the floor.

"What are you doing, man?" exclaimed the astonished notary, gathering the pieces together.

"Oh, Paul, Paul," cried the widow, "I cannot

speak to you! How cruel and honourable both together!"

"No, Madame, not a bit cruel. Had I indeed abandoned this good girl, and sold myself for your money, I should have been cruel and dishonourable too—but I could do neither."

"Oh!" cried the widow, hysterically, "am I come to this? Oh, Marguerite, you treacherous thing! to get my property from me, and steal him whom I valued more than all!"

"Ah, Madame," sobbed Marguerite, "I can excuse all you say—but I don't deserve it, I did *not* steal him from you, for he was mine, by promise and vow, in truth and honour, many a day before you had any right to think of him; and as for the money you have settled on me, it is true, I did follow the advice of my friends, and of Paul above all the rest, to get you to make me independent; but when we saw what your generosity did for me, giving me twice as much as you had intended, and twenty thousand

times more than you need have done, we could make but one resolution, and this is it"—and here she pulled out her assignment of the twenty thousand francs from her bosom, and following Paul's example she tore it into pieces.

"Oh, don't tear it, don't tear it," exclaimed the widow, "I'd rather you'd keep the money, and let me hate you!" and a violent flood of tears came to her relief.

"No, no, Madame Potdevin, you must not hate me," sobbed Marguerite, taking her mistress's hand; "you have all along loved me, and from childhood up, I have known no mother but you, and I have loved you and do love you like a child. Oh, do forgive me, Madame; I would have given Paul up entirely, when I found you liked him, but I couldn't—indeed, Madame, I couldn't; I struggled hard with myself, but he had a way with him that quite overcame all my resolutions."

"I know he had, the horrid wretch!" said the widow, convulsively.

"Come, come, Madame," whimpered Paul, taking the other hand, "do forgive me—it was not my fault—nature made me so."

"Don't touch *me* with your nasty hand, you—you—Oh Paul, Paul, Paul!" once more cried the poor widow, and her head involuntarily leaned against his shoulder, while she still held his and Marguerite's hands in hers. "Oh what shall I do or say?" continued she, unheedingly, and scarcely expecting an answer. But there was a prompt one quite ready.

"Forgive them, and tell them you do," slily whispered Belpêche.

"Ah, Monsieur Belpêche, are you there?" said the widow, raising her eyes languidly, and throwing their misty beams upon the insinuating old gardener.

"To be sure I am," replied he softly, "where would I be when the widow Potdevin was unhappy or uncomfortable?"

Shall I press the continuance of this scene upon my readers? or insult their ready tact at

winding up a story, by telling them the result? or weary them by spinning out details of what they know, by this time at least, was sure to happen? I will do no such thing, but let them one and all find out of themselves how the widow recovered her temper and her spirits—how she forgave the delinquents whom she could not punish—how she was touched by the honesty and independent spirit of both in returning to her what she had given away—how she could not bear the thoughts of entirely losing Marguerite, and giving up Paul—how she consented to their marriage, shared her fortune with them, and made it a condition that they should ever live together—how she prudently thought that, to avoid scandal and secure impunity, she could not do better than marry old Belpêche—how she married him accordingly—and how the whole party lived as happily and comfortably as best they might for the fifteen long years preceding my first visit to the inn, where I found them and left them just in the state described in the

opening pages of this tale. All this I leave my readers to settle to their own fancy, giving my sanction to the arrangement of the whole.

I hope, however, in my anxiety to be brief at this conclusion of my story, I have not omitted any of those little cementing points necessary to connect the whole. If I have, I throw myself on the indulgence of my readers, and beg that they, for whom I have avowedly left so much to fill up, will also supply such possible deficiencies. So that thus every reader providing for an omission as he thinks it ought to have been done by the author, the latter runs a better chance of giving general satisfaction.

I have very little indeed to communicate as to the doings of the "joint stock" proprietors of the inn. If any little bubbles (the natural associates connected with such companies) arose from time to time on the surface of the domestic waters, their bursting only left the stream to flow on untroubled again. Nothing, in fact, I believe, could have been more generally prosper-

ous and quiet than the lives and adventures of our doubly married household. Belpêche attended to his garden, took his nap by the fireside o'nights, and thus got a convenient habit of shutting his eyes on whatever he did not choose to see. Paul Ricochet gave up the fishing trade and took to inn-keeping, which he managed cleverly but rather clumsily. The widow and Marguerite, as joint mistresses, had no rivalries to disturb them. Paul performed to a marvel the duties of a good husband, and he made up in kind offices to Madame Potdevin, as well as he was able, for the disappointment she had in the first instance experienced. Her natural good sense soon reconciled her to the only state of things which was attainable, and she assented to Paul's favourite maxim that "so far all was right."

I have not thought it worth my while, and I am sure it is not worth my readers', to throw away a thought upon Captain Blouffe—I never inquired what became of him.

Perfect happiness, or freedom from its reverse, is not to be found in this world; therefore it is not astonishing that one subject of a painful nature was constantly mixed with the enjoyments of the inn and its inmates. This was the unfortunate imputation fixed indelibly upon the house, of its being haunted. Nothing could ever remove the impression that such was the case from the public mind, and indeed even the private circle of its inhabitants was one and all infected with the same suspicion, if not the actual belief. A thousand odd stories and remarkable coincidences had accumulated in the space of fifteen years, all tending to give great weight to the popular, and, as I have just said, to the private notion. It is needless to dwell on those. To many, such circumstantial evidence would prove nothing; to others, what I saw myself may be sufficient proof. The prevalent notion was, that the frequent visitings of the first years following the mysterious stranger's appearance and most awful death, had gradually

subsided into those which are said to be peculiar to angels, few and far between. In fact, an annual return was all that was believed in when I first saw the inn, and that was always supposed to take place on the anniversary of some one of the three nights on which Belpêche, Blouffe, and Ricochet took their memorable turns of watch. Except on those nights, travellers and townsmen freely slept at the inn, and feared nothing; but on *these* no one within the echo of the rumours of La Rochelle would, for any consideration, venture to encounter the risks which I unwittingly ran, and at any rate escaped from.

Whether the stranger's spirit did or does haunt the house, it is not for me to say. Report maintains strictly that the green chamber is and ever will be subject to its appearance, and that the habit of the being, during life, of hunting in the presses and cupboards, is still the distinctive proof of the spectre's identity. I myself have never encouraged the belief

that I saw "this thing," as Hamlet says. I am much more inclined to believe that it was the sleepy, and restless, and half unconscious Belpêche, that wandered in his dotage into the room where I lay, quietly opening and shutting the doors, the well oiled hinges of which did not betray the mortality of the opener and shutter. I wish to think that Ranger crept upon my bed and trembled there only from the natural timidity of his disposition, and I endeavour to discard all that is *super* in the whole adventure.

Still I do not venture to pronounce a positive opinion. I leave to theorists the task of balancing contending reasonings; and, for my own part, I conclude as I began, by asserting, in contradiction to the proverb, that "SEEING IS NOT BELIEVING."

END OF VOL. II.